

AUGUST  
1994

# INTERREGNUM

#5



*fantasy roleplaying and more*

# INTERREGNUM

## #5

*An Amateur Press Association  
covering fantasy roleplaying games  
and anything that interests those who play them.*

Peter Maranci, ed.

Topic: "Human Nature"

August 1994

Interregnum is an Amateur Publishing Association, comprised of zines written by individual contributors and mailed to the editor. It is collated and published approximately twelve times per year. New contributors and subscribers are always welcome.

A subscription costs \$1.00 per issue plus the actual cost of the selected method of mailing. Subscribers may open an account from which these costs are deducted by mailing a check or money order in US funds, payable to Peter Maranci, at the following address:

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Since Interregnum is an amateur production, it is necessary for contributors to help cover the costs of production: \$1 per single-sided master page mailed in. Alternatively, contributors may mail 355 good double-sided copies of their zine to the editor. The only additional cost to contributors is the price of the postage to mail their issue to them.

All zines sent in for publication in Interregnum should be copyrighted by the author. Copyright may be asserted by the use of the following phrase:

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Sample issues of Interregnum are available for \$3 each for US addresses, and \$4 in US funds for foreign/overseas mailing.

Many trademarked products are discussed in Interregnum. No challenge to the holders of these trademarks is intended.

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## PUBLICATION SCHEDULE:

⇒ The deadline for inclusion in Interregnum #6 is September 8th (the date given in IR #5 was a typo—sorry!). Zines for Interregnum #7 must arrive by October 6th.

⇒ The topic for Interregnum #6 is Humor. Have fun with it. ☺

—>Pete



Welcome to Interregnum Lite: The Summer Edition. ©

The July heat wave seems to have affected the normally-nimble fingers of our usual contributors. As of this writing very few of the usual suspects have weighed in, scant days before we go to press.

Fortunately two new contributors have stepped into the breach. Welcome, **Dale** and **Andy**! It also seems likely that a few more zines will show up before all is said and done. Still, it seems that this may be one of the smaller issues so far. Let's hope that August is temperate and comfortable, inspiring a host of zines for Interregnum #6.

\* On other fronts: we've come a long way in four issues. The copy count for Interregnum #1 was 60; it's now 330 and rising. Much of that is promotional issues, of course, but subscriptions have been steadily rising too.

In fact, we're already approaching the maximum number of promotional issues that can be produced. Since subscriptions have priority, at some point soon the number of promotional issues distributed will inevitably have to go down. That's unfortunate, since demand is high; copies of IR #4 flew off the shelves at an unprecedented rate this month, disappearing in just a few days.

As the total number of sites carrying promotional issues increases, each site will receive fewer copies. That should help IR reach a maximum geographical distribution, which is the preferable goal.

\* As was mentioned several issues ago, there's a possibility that Interregnum may become affiliated in some way with one or two game-related organizations. The entire matter is up in the air at the moment; as details become available they will be announced here and on the Interregnum Internet discussion list. In any case Interregnum will retain the essential independence and freedom of expression which is, I believe, vital to a healthy APA.

\* Late bulletin: One of the two organizations is the **Strategy Gaming Society**, a national organization not to be confused with the MIT Strategic Gaming Society. An SGS flyer has been included in this issue.

\* I should take a moment here to thank **Doug Jorenby** for doing a fine job in moderating and encouraging activity on the Interregnum Internet mailing list while I was away on vacation. The discussions on the Net were illuminating—I may reprint sections of them here in future issues—and we have Doug to thank for that.

On the main subject of the discussion itself: my remarks about comments in IR last month were not intended as a final decree, but merely as an opening question. Comments will *not* be eliminated from Interregnum; as someone pointed out, not only are comments an important reason that contributors write zines, but they are also a unique part of APA heritage and are often of interest to readers. We'll retain the practice of commenting on zines. However, a few steps might be recommended to keep the comments interesting and meaningful to the readership at large:

- 1) Comments should be properly referenced if possible, giving at least a basic idea of what's being talked about.
- 2) Long comments should be expanded into articles, or separated out and put in the main body of the zine.
- 3) If possible, authors should consider printing comments using a smaller (but still readable) font size than the rest of the zine.

Any other suggestions will be welcomed. And of course none of the above is mandatory—King Log speaks, not King Stork.

\* Another bit of news: Copies of IR #1-4 were recently mailed to **Shadis**, a roleplaying magazine that reviews small press publications. They have a pretty big backlog of material to read, so the review may not surface for some time. However, that's something to keep an eye out for in the future.

Incidentally, if anyone knows of any other good places to get Interregnum some exposure please drop me a line any time.

Here's hoping the zines for IR #6 are already in the works...

—>Pete

# The Interregnum FAQsheet

**Interregnum** is a monthly Amateur Press Association comprised of individual zines written and formatted by various authors and mailed to the editor for collation, reproduction, and binding. The primary focus is roleplaying games, fantasy, and science fiction, but diversity is valued—authors may write about anything they wish. **Interregnum** is written by mature gamers who necessarily have other subjects of interest beyond roleplaying games. It is hoped that the inclusion of such subjects will produce interesting insights into the roleplaying hobby.

**Subscriptions:** There is no fixed subscription period. Subscribers should mail a check or money order in US funds payable to Peter Maranci to establish an account; as issues are mailed the cost of the issue and the postage used to mail it will be deducted from the account. When the account gets low the amount left will be noted on the mailing envelope. At that point the subscriber may send more money to continue receiving issues, put their account on hold until some future time, or have the balance returned (at the editor's option, a final issue may be mailed instead to close out accounts in which the balance is less than the cost of one issue).

The usual cost per issue is \$2 plus postage. Due to special circumstances the cost has been lowered to \$1 per issue plus postage. Please note that when and/or if the special deal lapses we will return to the original rate.

**Postage:** Within the United States 1st class mail for the average issue of **Interregnum** costs \$1.67, while book rate (4th class) costs \$1.05. Subscribers may choose which method of mailing they prefer. Overseas subscribers may choose any method of mailing available from the US Postal Service.

**Sample Issues:** Sample issues may be obtained by mailing a check or money order for \$3 if the issue is to be mailed within the United States. A sample issue mailed outside the US is \$4 in US funds.

**Writing for Interregnum:** Anyone is welcome to write for **IR**. Since **Interregnum** is an amateur publication, not for profit, contributors help defray the cost of photocopying their zines. The cost is normally \$2 per single-sided page. However, the special circumstances noted above have made it possible to reduce the cost to \$1 per page. Contributors are not charged for a copy of the issue they write in—their only additional cost is postage.

Alternatively contributors may mail in 330+ copies of their zine, printed double-sided to reduce mailing costs. Zines mailed via UPS or any other private delivery service should be sent "no signature required".

**Format:** Zines must be clean and sharp enough to photocopy well. Desktop publishing is not required; zines may be typed, or even handwritten. Margins should be at least 1/2 inch wide on the top, bottom, and outer edges; a one-inch margin should be used for the binding edge (the left side for odd-numbered pages, right side for even-numbered pages). Internal art enhances readability and is always appreciated, as are multiple columns and subheads.

**Content:** Contributors are free to write as they wish, almost totally free of editorial oversight. I ask only that nothing be included which could lead to legal difficulties; please keep in mind that **Interregnum** is shipped across state lines and overseas, and is distributed in game stores which are open to all ages.

**Copyright:** All zines should be copyrighted by the author. Copyright may be asserted through the following phrase: Copyright (Your Name) (Date) or © (Your Name) (Date). (c) is not a valid designation.

Copyrighted and trademarked material is often discussed in **Interregnum**. Discussion of such material is not intended as a challenge to any copyright or trademark.

**Emailing Zines:** Zines in ASCII form may be emailed to the editor via the InterNet for DTP formatting, or sent in on 3.5" or 5.25" DOS-compatible floppy disks. Since time is limited (and becomes tighter as collation looms), ASCII zines sent in for layout should arrive at least four days before the deadline for printed zines. I'll attempt to capture the style of the contributor, if I have a sample of previous work and enough time. I can also accept files created with Publish-It for DOS or Windows or PostScript files on 3.5 or 5.25" disks.

Email/disk contributors may choose to have their zines laser-printed; in that case the cost of the printing will be charged to their account (\$0.50 per page plus the cost of rental time if necessary—not more than a total of \$1 per page). Alternatively zines can be printed on a 24-pin dot matrix printer at no additional charge.

**Letters to the Editor** will be gladly received, and printed in the editorial section. No letter will be published, however, that is marked "not for publication".

**Back Issues:** Back issues are available while supplies last. Issues #1-3 cost \$2 each in US funds, plus the cost of postage. Subsequent issues are available at \$1 + postage. Some savings in postage costs may be realized by shipping several issues at once.

**Distribution:** A limited number of free promotional copies of Interregnum are distributed at selected game stores and other sites. If you're interested in distributing free copies of IR, please contact the editor.

Please note that as the number of distributors increases (and it has been doing so, steadily) the number of promotional copies available for each site will necessarily decrease. Furthermore, production of promotional copies may be reduced or eliminated without warning. Only paying subscribers can be sure to receive all issues of IR. Paying subscribers receive their issues weeks or even months in advance of promotional distribution. Finally, only paying subscribers will receive special mailings of bonus material, should any occur. In other words, the Editor strongly urges readers of the promotional copies to subscribe. ☺

**Net Connection:** An InterNet alias has been set up which allows correspondents to receive information and updates about the status of Interregnum. Anyone who would like to be on that list should send email to maranci@max.tiac.net and include a valid InterNet address.

## **Glossary:**

RPG: Role Playing Game

IR: Interregnum. You're soaking in it.

TWH: The Wild Hunt, an old and respected APA based in the Greater Boston area. A number of Interregnum contributors have written for TWH, or still do.

A&E: Alarums and Excursions, a slightly older APA based on the West Coast.

RQ: RuneQuest™, a roleplaying system played by a number of contributors to Interregnum.

AD&D™: Advanced Dungeons & Dragons™, a roleplaying system

LARP or LRP: Live Action Role Playing (game); a generic term

PBEM: Play By Email

BTW: By The Way

IMHO: In My Humble Opinion

RAEBNC: Read And Enjoyed But No Comment. An acronym commonly used by procrastinating contributors. 8^>}

CD-ROM: Compact Disk, Read Only Memory. Laser disks for computer which hold huge amounts of data. Many high-quality computer games are released on CD-ROM.

:) : a smile, indicating that the text preceding is not to be taken entirely seriously

8^>} : The cynical smile of a bearded, bespectacled editor

# LOG THAT

## #5

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*The following article was written for an amateur publication based in California (I haven't received a copy yet, and so can't give the details). Waste not, want not, say I—and in any case the subject of live roleplaying has not yet been covered to a great extent here. For those unfamiliar with the subject, it may prove a helpful (if perhaps a bit biased) introduction.*



## IT'S ALIVE!

A Brief Introduction to Live Roleplaying  
by Peter Maranci

The first thing you need to know about live roleplaying is that it's big. Too big for anyone to properly describe in anything shorter than a book. With roots as varied as the Society for Creative Anachronism, the 'Method' style of acting, theater in general, and even children's

cops & robbers games, live roleplaying is actually far bigger than traditional table-top RPGs—and far older. At the same time, live roleplaying is actually the new kid on the horizon of the roleplaying scene! With all that in mind, here's a small introduction to live roleplaying.

Some people still can't decide what to call the person who runs a traditional roleplaying game. Dungeonmaster? Gamemaster? Referee? Moderator? It's a question that's been argued for years in some circles, and probably will be for years to come. Likewise, there are many different opinions as to what 'live roleplaying' should properly be called. After all, other kinds of roleplaying aren't 'dead', right?

The two most common names are "Live Roleplaying", which is abbreviated as "LRP", and "Live-Action Roleplaying", called "LARP". Since LARP is probably more accurate (and easier to pronounce), we'll stick with that for the sake of simplicity.

LARP games come in two basically different flavors: *Interactive Literature* and *Live Combat*. These two types are actually quite different from each other.

## **INTERACTIVE LITERATURE:**

Interactive Literature games are usually one-shot events, run at hotels during science-fiction or gaming conventions. Players dress up and act out their roles, but all combat is handled by some non-physical system such as cards or

scissors-paper-rock—can't have people fighting in the halls and upsetting the regular guests, after all! But the focus of IL games is rarely combat. Instead, players must use special skills, abilities, knowledge and possessions to interact with the other players. Intrigue, conspiracy, backstabbing, wheeling & dealing, and coalition-building are the main elements of such games.

Though many of these games give players the opportunity to pre-register, it's also often possible to register at the game itself. Usually players are given a pre-written character, ready-made by the Gamemasters with goals, desires, and a personality already determined. While they may let you indicate what sort of character you'd like to play during pre-registration, there are no guarantees—more often than not the character you receive has little or nothing to do with the personality and characteristics requested. Players receive a special badge with their character name on it, a packet of information about the rules and background of the game, a special character sheet with private information, and cards representing money or special items that the character possesses. Players then go out into the area of the game and mingle, working out their individual plots.

Characters in IL-type games can't be carried over from game to game—each is specifically written for that game alone, and is the property

of the Gamemasters. In other words, each new Interactive Literature game is a whole new story, and you can't bring in a character you've already played (with rare exceptions). It's possible that the new Vampire LARP (which appears to be a type of Interactive Literature game) may allow continuing characters, but as the author has no direct experience with Vampire he'll make no promises.



Games can last a few hours up to two or more days. The length of the game is generally pre-set, with a ceremony scheduled at the end of the event.

These games generally have anywhere from twenty to one hundred and fifty or more players. Often more than one gamemaster puts on the game; they operate out of a "control room" where players can go to have special acts judged, resolve disputes, get information, buy items, or do any number of other special actions. Typically some of the gamemasters also spend time wandering around the area. In some games the GMs take specialized roles, such as "God of Thieves", "Martian Trading Factor", or "Fate". In such games they handle only those things which pertain to their role, and players must find the proper GM for their needs.

An advantage to IL games is that they're far more flexible in setting. Since all the action takes place on a social and conversational level, the games can be set in any sort of background:



science fiction, fantasy, horror, even comedy. Sometimes such games use a specific setting. Asimov's Foundation, Baum's The Wizard of Oz, the RuneQuest RPG's world of *Glorantha*, and even the macabre world of H. P. Lovecraft have been made into Interactive Literature games. The atmosphere in such games can be tremendously fun, if they're handled right. If handled poorly they can be more disappointing than a game with a generic background. The failure of the *Foundation and Destiny* game run a few years ago in Boston, for example, was particularly disappointing to players who were fans of Isaac Asimov.

Interactive Literature games offer a chance to play a role within a large group. Success often depends on how well you can deal with (or manipulate) people. In that context, however, Interactive Literature can be a truly fun roleplaying experience.

On the down side, IL games can be frustrating if run or written poorly. In many games not all the characters are equal—the Mayor of Marakesh is far more important than Hasim, the street beggar, for example. Sometimes the “better” roles are given to those who sign up first for the game, but often key roles are given to players that the GMs know and trust. This can result in favoritism if handled badly.

Some IL games become little more than “widget hunts”. In these, several pieces of something important to the game have been split up between a number of characters. The parts must be gathered and assembled correctly to accomplish the goal of the game. Such games are often characterized by lots of trading between characters. They can get boring unless the players work to put a lot of drama and intrigue into their roles.

There are a few things that any player in an Interactive Literature game can do to increase

the chance for enjoyment and success. Here are five:

**1) Keep Your Secrets!** Never let anyone see your character sheet. Keep at least some of your secrets for as long as you can. Once they're told, they'll soon become common knowledge. It's much more fun to be the only person who knows the one thing that everyone is wondering about, and it can give you power and leverage over the others as the game comes to a peak.



**2) Know Your Associates!** Most characters are written with goals that involve them in a smaller plot within the larger framework. These subplots are usually written to push several characters together. The character information sheet will indicate associates, friends, and enemies in this case. Meet them, talk to them, find out what you can—but,

**3) Trust No One!** Everyone has secrets, and unless the game is quite unusual they're all looking out for Number One. Alliances are possible, and even necessary—but remember that everyone has secret goals, and you don't *really*



know all their motivations. The Grand Backstab is a tradition that can never be forgotten.

**4) Go For The Unusual Angle!** If your character is a minor one with a limited role, it's often worthwhile to search for some way to throw a monkey wrench into the works of the game. Steal something valuable and hide it, or make up a false story and spread it around. There's nothing stopping you from making up a new organization or plot. A player with nothing left to do in one game amused himself by writing up incendiary pamphlets attacking the ruling class, and announcing a meeting of a secret group of revolutionaries. Nothing came of it, but he described the excitement of sneaking around and putting up his posters without being caught as the most fun he'd had in the entire game.

**5) Mingle!** This is perhaps the most important thing to do. These games are interaction-driven. A character who doesn't talk to people will have nothing to do. The more people you talk to, the greater the chance that you'll get involved in many different plots.

Two Interactive Literature groups are the **Society for Interactive Literature (SIL)**, perhaps the first IL group; and the **Interactive Literature Foundation (ILF)**, which split off from the SIL over regional and political differences. The ILF has more members overall, while membership in the SIL is by invitation only (you can subscribe to their magazine, though). It's not necessary to join either, however, as both put on games that are open to anyone. Most conventions will advertise if a IL game will be part of their activities, and games are often announced in the [rec.games.frp.misc](#) and [alt.games.frp.live-action](#) newsgroups of the InterNet.

## **LIVE COMBAT:**

Live Combat games are just that—live combat. Players fight with padded weapons (boffers), against NPCs or each other. Apart from that one common point, there's a great deal of variety in this category. And there are many organizations all around the country which run such games.

A few generalizations: most Live Combat games are set in a fantasy background. It's a lot easier to use a padded sword or club than a padded blaster! Likewise, most LC games are held outside, which can limit the playing season in some areas. Some LC groups run indoor non-combat games out of season.

Unlike IL games, it's usually necessary to join an organization to play in a Live Combat game; this is due to the fact that though such games are generally very safe, with safety checks of all boffers, nonetheless they must have insurance—and insurance companies prefer that all participants sign a waiver and pay to join the group.



Most LC groups allow you to create your own character. The character may be played again and again, going from game to game. As time goes by, the character gains "experience", adding abilities and powers which are often represented as "levels". Characters may usually be taken in certain specialized classes, such as Thief, Wizard, Fighter, and others.

Does that sound familiar? In many ways most LC games strongly resemble Dungeons & Dragons™.



There are two basic types of game in the Live Combat school of roleplaying: the Line Course and the World Course. In the line course a small group of players (usually three to ten) travel along a set route, with a very specific goal in mind. They begin with a request for aid from a patron, who gives them information on the prize to be recovered or the enemy to be destroyed. Setting out, the party meets monsters, bandits, traps, friends, and other challenges along the way. Usually there are puzzles to be solved, and a final showdown with the forces of Evil—a Battle Royale. At the epilogue the reward is bestowed, and the loot gained in the adventure is divided amongst the party. And at least some groups have a pizza party at a member's house after the game.

The line course is very much like an old-fashioned D&D™ dungeon, with a very limited number of options for the players—the difference being that the game is held outside, and combat is done physically rather than with dice. Though having such a limited choice of action might sound frustrating, in most cases it

isn't—the physical challenge and excitement of not knowing what might be lurking behind a rock or within the bushes keeps players on their toes, much too busy to worry about what choices they can make. It's fun, in the same way that even a clunky old D&D module can be fun once in a while.

A World Course is a much bigger proposition: an outdoor area is filled with NPCs, perhaps in the form of a fantasy village or town (much like a renaissance fair). Players may wander around the area, interacting with each other as they like—in some cases they even may be denizens of the village themselves. This takes a lot of people and resources, but allows many more people to play, too. Only the largest Live Combat groups are able to put on a world course game.

Such games often have a continuing background—the village and the people within it stay the same game after game, and there is a strict social hierarchy in power. These games can involve quite a bit of intrigue and strategy, with combat less common than in a line course game. After all, the town guards might arrest you for

fighting! Incidentally, these games are often played overnight while players and NPCs camp out.



A problem which is common to all LC groups is the question of ranged attacks. How do players use archery to attack far-off enemies, or spells to fight from a distance?

There are many different ways that these problems have been handled. Some groups actually use real bows and arrows with padded tips to represent archery, but this is considered unsafe by most insurance companies. As a result,

most such groups are moving to the use of Nerf™-type weapons, which are expensive but very safe.

Other groups use beanbags to represent both arrows and spells. Apart from a high rate of loss (beanbags can be hard to find in a forest) this method works fairly well, though in combat it can be hard to know if you've been hit by a beanbag—and difficult to distinguish between “arrow” bags and “spell” bags.

Other groups use a calling system for ranged spells and archery. The player calls out the damage or effect, and the target—in such games the participants must each try to dress in a specific color, so as to allow an attacker to say “Arrow, four points, blue”. This system has drawbacks too, though it's probably the safest of all methods.

Live Combat packs a physical feeling of excitement that no other form of roleplaying can match. A pack of axe-wielding zombies can get your adrenaline pumping a lot quicker when they're real and coming at you than when they're described, or coming at you with index cards. A line course game has the advantage of allowing you to trust your comrades, and work together as a team—ideal for those who are tired of intrigue and backstabbing. World courses can be quite exotic—if everyone has costumed and decorated well, they can provide a more convincing simulation of another world than any other system.



Live Combat games have problems too, of course. The risk of injury is always made as small as possible, but nonetheless it *is* there. It's usually possible to take a role that less physically demanding than most, but everyone in a game is going to have a good chance of having to defend

themselves with a weapon. Unlike IL-type games, a character death means a lot—months or years of playing effort and experience points can be lost in a swordstroke, though resurrection is a possibility in many games. Since the games are usually played outside, weather can become a problem—it's hard to roleplay at 18 degrees Fahrenheit!

A few tips for Live Combat games:

**1) Choose your clothing carefully.** It should be strong, appropriate to the weather, and safe. You may have to fall down or move quickly, and it could be disastrous to tangle your clothing at the wrong moment, or fall on something hard. Good shoes or boots are important in a line course, since they often involve a lot of hiking.

**2) Pack everything you need** for several hours—snacks, water, and any first aid or medical supplies you might need. Make sure to inform the gamemasters if you have any special medical requirements.

**3) DO NOT TOUCH!** Physical contact between players is forbidden by nearly all live combat groups, particularly in combat situations. No hand-to-hand is permitted, and all combat must be with padded weapons or ranged effects.

**4) NO REAL WEAPONS!** Likewise, real weapons are generally banned from LC games, even summed dulled ones worn just for show. Insurance companies are particularly strict about that restriction.

Two Live Combat organizations are the **International Fantasy Gaming Society (IFGS)**, and **New England Roleplaying Organization (NERO)**. Both have a number of branches all over the US. NERO tends towards strong social hierarchies (nobility & commoners) and large world course "villages", while the IFGS offers both world and line courses with a more open and casual social structure. There are *many* more Live Combat groups—check at your local game store or on the alt.games.frp.live-action newsgroup on the InterNet.

## POINTS IN COMMON

Both Interactive Literature and Live Combat games share a few points in common. Appropriate costuming is always appreciated, though usually not mandatory. A fee is required for most games—this can range from a few dollars to fifty or more. Politeness out-of-game is a good idea. Alcohol and drugs are usually forbidden. Lastly, it's wise not to offend or shock non-players—one large organization recently found itself banned by the town where their game site was located because of the actions of a few obnoxious members!

## WHERE NEXT?

Live roleplaying has not been available in commercial form until comparatively recently.

Even now, there is no real large-scale push to commercialize the genre, as TSR popularized RPGs. But the signs are on the horizon. Live roleplaying is spreading fast, in the form of hundreds of small local LARP organizations. Some are commercial, some are not—but all of these organizations share a desire to spread the word about LARP. Major game companies, too, are getting into the act. Chaosium, the company which produces *\_Call of Cthulhu\_*, *\_RuneQuest\_*, and *\_Stormbringer\_* has recently published a live "freeform" game. White Wolf has published its *\_Vampire\_* live game, which seems to be bringing in some newcomers to

roleplaying as well.

From the other end, the Dream Park Corporation™ is inventing "special effect" systems (computer-sensing weapons and spell effects) which are used with the IFGS system to produce more lifelike

fantasy worlds. Demos of these systems are being held at some conventions, most notably at

GenCon. Dream Park is also planning on building theme parks for live roleplaying, though such remain years or decades away. Finally, there are rumors that Disney and industrial giants as Sony may be negotiating with Dream Park Corporation to produce live roleplaying products, or may be developing such technology on their own.

It may not be long before we're all spending hundreds of dollars to fight Evil in luxurious resorts...but until that day, LARP remains a fun and exciting way to spend a few hours or days living out another form of the roleplaying dream.



## TOPIC #5: HUMAN NATURE

I was inspired to chose Human Nature as the topic of IR #5 by a water balloon which sailed toward my open car window and exploded near my head as I was driving. Some kid out for kicks, probably.

A petty and spiteful act, not normally worth a second thought. In fact I'd come out of it pretty well; the balloon could have made a direct hit through the window, stunning me. Instead it struck the frame of the car, soaking me but doing no real harm. Still, I couldn't help but try to make a little sense of the event. What did this sort of thing mean?

Well, one thing it meant was that kids can be vicious little bastards—but I already knew that. ☺

Humans seem to be be a mass of opposing qualities: good and evil, kindness and cruelty. In fact, human nature is a mess! Nothing but intermingled shades of gray. My study of the anthropologist Ernest Becker's investigation of human nature for my senior undergraduate thesis had turned up some interesting and at least partially valid ideas: he theorized that evil (or Evil) in human nature was the product of the essential neurosis caused by the fact that human beings (like all living things) wish to live forever, but being possessed of intelligence cannot help but know that they *will* die.

Becker developed that theme considerably, of course. His attempt to unify the social/anthropological and individual/psychological views was innovative, to say the least.

Be that as it may, the questions of human nature are not often dealt with in roleplaying games (at least in my experience). This seems a

pity, since that subject is perhaps the most fruitful source of mature and meaningful art.

Think of Othello, torn between jealousy and trust. Hamlet, agonizing over the desire for revenge and the fear of action. Gilligan, torn between a love of coconuts and fear of the Skipper. ☺ Okay, Hamlet might be a silly example. But the core of most great literature is firmly set in the basic questions of human nature.

How can these elements be brought into roleplaying games?



Scenarios focusing on such problems could certainly be written. In fact, some have. However, they're vastly outnumbered by the majority of published material, much of which is action-adventure oriented. It may be that the market for mature roleplaying material is too small to be worthwhile, except (perhaps) in amateur media. On the other hand, the juvenile tenor of most roleplaying games may be what's responsible for the failure of the hobby to expand beyond its limited boundaries.

Come to think of it, the action-adventure orientation of most RPGs might also explain why there are so few women who play—it may be sexist to say so, but my experience is that most women tend to prefer relationship-oriented stories to action-adventure.

## SCENARIO HOOKS II

*The Watchers of Nereyon* is a 'serious' campaign that I've been running for about seven years now. It's unusual in that the players possess considerably more freedom of action than in most games I've known; the world has been mapped out in my head, and as the players wander about I have to make up encounters on the spot. Time after time the players have missed or deliberately ignored potential scenarios. Nearly as often they pursue what I'd thought of as a fairly unimportant encounter with determination.

A certain amount of realism is important to me. Both important and trivial encounters are a natural part of life; not every beggar on the street can be the King in disguise. I therefore often create encounters which are relatively unimportant (though it's worth noting that in most game worlds any creature is going to think of itself as important, at least to itself).

All this is to explain why not all the scenario hooks below are of cosmic significance.

1) Snake crossing. The road ahead is crossed by a row of non-poisonous snakes, slithering in single file. The snakes are brown and harmless,

each about a foot long. They crawl out of the brush on the left of the road, and into the brush on the right. Investigation shows that they are coming out of a hole thirty meters to the right of the road and crawling into another two kilometers to the left. If their way is blocked, they go around or over the obstruction. They finish crossing the road after ten minutes.

One out of every 100 snakes has swallowed some unusual item.

2) Big frog. A very large (about basketball size) green frog is sitting next to the road. It is a handsome frog, and seems to be dying of thirst; unfortunately the nearest stream is a mile back on the road. The frog seems unafraid of the party, but that may be due to dehydration.

If the frog is kissed, absolutely nothing happens unless the PC is romantically inclined towards amphibians. If so, please don't write and let me know what happens ☺.



3) Priest and peasants. A priest of a local pantheon and several peasants are hunting for healing plants nearby: there is a wasting disease in their village. They will accept help if it is offered.

## HIS FACE A MASK OF SHAME

In keeping with **IR**'s tradition of reporting the very latest news (a tradition I just invented a minute ago ☺), here's a three word review of **The Mask**, the new weird superhero movie starring Jim Carrey: "Sucked big time."

That's Lois' take on the movie. I agree, but am of course more loquacious in my opinion; the movie is an abysmal failure. Jim Carrey is a uniquely gifted comic actor, a real talent; the special effects range from good to excellent. The concept and images offered great potential. Unfortunately the writing was apparently subcontracted to trolls—AD&D™ trolls, that is, not RuneQuest ones.

Not a cliché was left out of this dog. The beautiful blonde nightclub singer, the wild and evil younger gangster pushing against the rule of the older crime boss, the dark city in decay, the exasperated cops who never solve the case...not ONE SINGLE MOMENT of this film was anything other than what you'd expect if it was written by the worst hack soap-opera wordsmiths on TV. The lines were leaden, though Carrey did his best with them; the romantic relationship was simply lame, a waste of time. In fact, the movie wasted far too much time *not* looking at *The Mask*.

A movie like this has the potential to make a truly wonderful flight of fantasy; reality can break down and create something magical. In

this case, however, the reverse was done: they took something that could have been great, and made it intensely boring. *The Mask* was a truly bizarre phenomenon, yet somehow everyone simply accepted it without question—I mean, we're talking about an insane *living cartoon* here, and all the characters treated it as if it were nothing very much out of the ordinary! If the rest of the world had also had insane qualities that might have made sense, but it didn't. The world was just the usual boring "crime-ridden decaying city" setting.

It's worth noting that Jim Carrey did seem to have a problem keeping his face still. Even when he was playing the "Dr. Jekyll" half of his role his facial muscles were visibly straining not to move, and failing in little ways.

To sum up, this film just doesn't work. We seriously considered walking out after about half an hour, but kept hoping that it would get better; unfortunately it didn't. Avoid this turkey like the plague!

Rating: D-

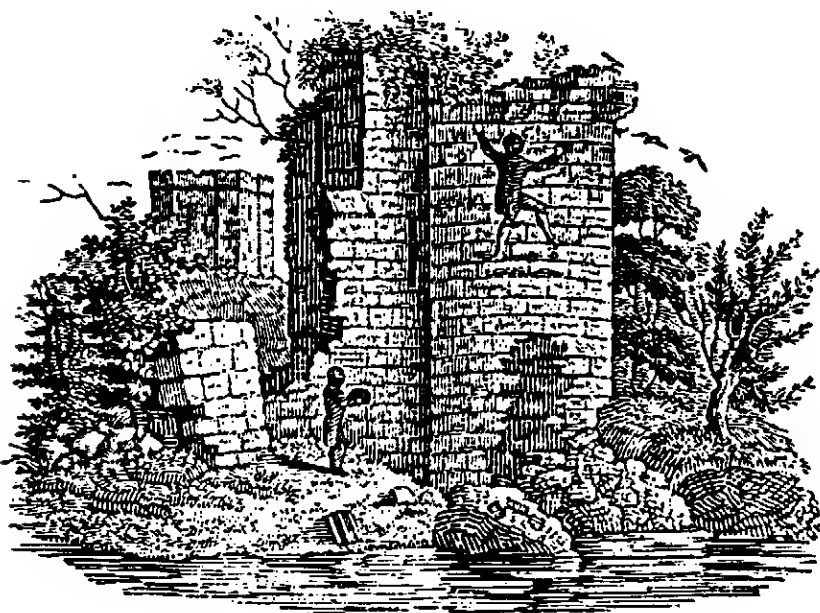
## COMMENTS #4

**Curtis Taylor:** Good

heavens, Curtis. If you'd searched for a thousand years you might never have found a subject that I'm *less* qualified to comment on than **Magic: The Gathering**! Given the obsessive way the players I know act, I've avoided it like the plague. I only hope that I have some natural resistance, since I'm so absolutely bad at wargames of all sorts. ☺

On the other hand, I wouldn't be surprised at all if your zine was the reason that promotional copies of **Interregnum #4** went off the shelves so quickly.

✧ Since I've stopped reading the **RuneQuest Daily Digest** (though I still log it daily), your zine has





become my main source for information on what's going on in the world of RQ. Thanks for the updates.

**David Hoberman:** Fiction about your science-fiction world of the Hegemony seems to turn up pretty often in IR, David. Perhaps I should write something about my old character the Prince in your game. Though of course I never found out the secret of his world. Is it still a part of the 'canon', I wonder?

✧ Your discussion of alien societies was very well done; it's true that all too often GMs and writers either base them on some exaggerated quality of a known human society or make them totally incomprehensible.

The crux of the problem may be that we simply don't know what alien life could be *like*. To what extent does the basic structure of DNA common to all forms of life on this planet make us inherently different from some form of life using an alternate method of genetic coding? Is "genetic coding" itself necessary for all potential forms of life? We might assume that even alien forms of life will possess the basic qualities of life on Earth, including ingestion, reproduction, growth—but we really don't know.

That's what makes it fun to play with the possibilities, of course. It's a pity that so many GMs and writers limit themselves in that regard.

✧ Regarding the "quality" of the people of the Internet as a source for roleplayers: It's true that high intelligence is no guarantee of maturity or sensibility. In fact, the reverse might be true. But are maturity or sensibility the hallmarks of roleplayers? ☺

It seems to me that *imagination* is what makes a roleplayer—and that people of high intelligence are more likely to possess that quality. Since most of the people on the Internet possess above-average intelligence, it seems logical that there should be a higher percentage of potential roleplayers among them.

**Doug Jorenby:** Regarding Magic: The Gathering, you might be interested to hear that a local chain of record/comic stores—a terminally "cool" place—is now carrying M:TG. I nearly screamed (with laughter?) when I saw the cards on the shelf. It's the kind of place where teens with pierced noses walk around wearing black, their mohawks dyed in bizarre colors...that such a store would carry M:TG seems incongruous, though I couldn't say exactly why.

I'm sorry to hear that some gamers are purchasing Magic cards instead of roleplaying material. But

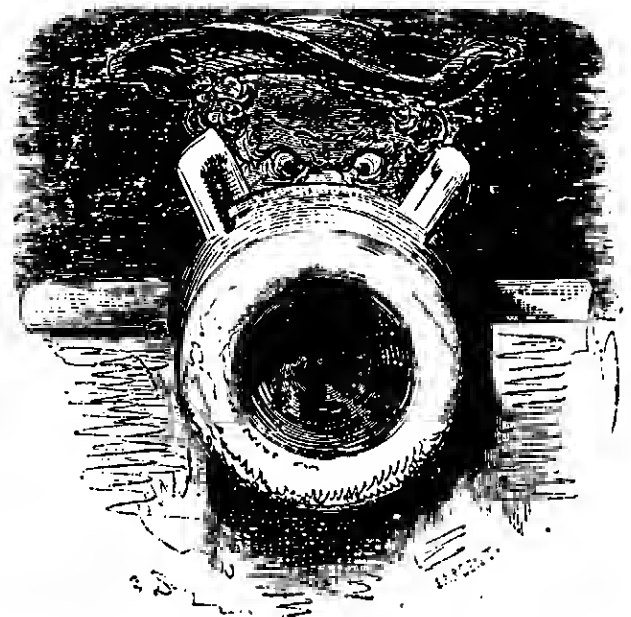
perhaps the gamers who do that weren't that interested in roleplaying to begin with. In any case, Magic is almost certainly a fad; when it peaks and declines dedicated gamers will probably come back.

On the other hand, **Wizards of the Coast** could do a great service to the roleplaying hobby by publishing a roleplaying game based on M:TG before the fad crests. Given that they seem to have penetrated even more markets than AD&D did at its height, they could introduce huge numbers of new people to roleplaying. I've heard no more about that project, though.

✧ Why do I publish . Doug? Hmm. I'll have to get back to you on that. 8^>}

**George Phillies:** What sort of typeface are you using, George? If you're using TrueType or PostScript I have access to thousands of them, and will be glad to send you a sampler. Not that your current font is bad, but it's true that the photocopying process (I don't use the term "xerox" for professional reasons) treats different fonts in different ways.

✧ It's true that one of the last episodes of **Star Trek: The Next Generation** featured a massive threat to the ecology of the Galaxy caused by warp drive. Their solution was to stop using the higher warp factors, except possibly in emergencies. This fundamental change to the Star Trek universe was completely ignored in the following episodes, of course. Continuity was never their strong point.



That makes me wonder what a science fiction series would be like if it were to follow the "Hill Street Blues" pattern of interconnected plotlines that thread from episode

to episode. It may be that **Babylon 5** is doing that in some way, but at this point it's not obvious.

Though I enjoy and respect the works of Tolkien and (to a lesser degree) Heinlein, I suspect that Star Trek has reached many millions more than the works of either author. Too many people are unwilling to read these days...or only read trashy romantic novels and potboiling best-sellers.

**Collie Collier:** Wow. Political Science professors have become a lot more permissive since I was in college eight years ago. My profs would never have allowed me to write a paper on a roleplaying universe! On the other hand a Sociology professor ran a class in which our final grade was based on the design of a boardgame by pairs of students (I got an A, of course), and also ran a class in which my main project was to create a roleplaying organization on campus.

In any case I thought your article was extremely interesting—I zoomed right through it. Though I may not be the most unobjective reader, since I actually played in that world.

I have to ask—did you receive a grade yet?

**Eric Robinson:** Yikes! My parents will no doubt have some searching questions for me after reading your zine, Eric. let me say for the record that your portrayal of them was not based on reality! 8^>}

In a way I'm a bit constrained in making comments on your piece, since it's about me. Shucks. In any case, I'm pleased to welcome you as the first non-gamer to write for IR.

I enjoyed *Afflatus* a great deal. What images! "...the excess of his tiresome weight" and "...his sparse red hair lay pasted to his temple..." both had me...um, yelping with shock. The pen is indeed mightier than the sword. And that speech...do I really talk like that?

I'd certainly like to see the second half of the story, if you ever feel like writing it out.

**Virgil Greene:** An interesting discussion of technology and Magic, Virgil. Your description of magic as resembling a mathematical formula provoked a chain of thought; the whole question of "flavor" is the key, I think. In RuneQuest and most other roleplaying games magic is very mechanistic, quite similar to technology; contrariwise magic in fantasy fiction tends to be mystical, more of an "Art". When opening the door to Moria Gandalf did nothing so mundane as using spell points or slots.

✧ Your analysis of the underlying Highlander/Immortal concept was very interesting indeed—I haven't seen anything like it elsewhere.

✧ I like your characterization of the authors of the live roleplaying game *Nexus*, by the way. Well put. 8^>}

**Gil Pili:** My sympathies on your landlord trouble, Gil. There's nothing I hate more than a nosy landlord. When Scott and I lived in Roslindale our crusty old landlord (a real character) lived in the upper half of the two-family house; he'd sneak down and peek at us through an intermediate window while we watched TV. Bizarre.

Our landlady now lives in California, which is certainly a comfortable distance. 8^>}

✧ I agree entirely with your assessment of the RuneQuest Daily Digest. It's completely out of touch with the needs of RuneQuest players, as opposed to Gloranthan minutiae wonks.

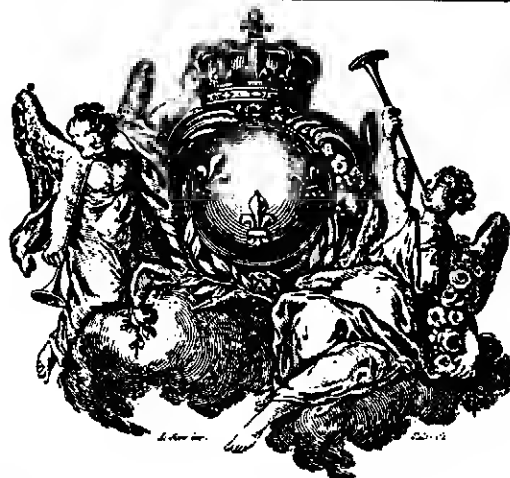
✧ The *Guardian Spirit* scenario is very impressive! Congratulations to you and Dan both. I only hope that

Greg doesn't shoot it down at the last minute—Gloranthan orthodoxy seems to have actually strengthened in the last few years, despite the ostensible "subjectivization" of the world.

**Bob Butler:**

Welcome to IR, Bob! I was wondering if we'd ever get any zines with photos in them.

☺



✚ I must admit that I never thought I'd see a zine in IR about combat aircraft. Stretching our horizons, eh? Just the sort of thing I like to see.

✚ I notice that three of the four participants were named Bob. Must have been kind of confusing over the radio...

The dialogue between the Stomach and brain was highly amusing, and rather reminiscent of at least one of Fredric Brown's "Gallagher" stories—they're virtually impossible to find now, but if you get the chance I'd highly recommend them.

**David Dunham:** Welcome aboard, David! I'm glad to have another RuneQuest writer in IR, despite my present dissatisfaction with the way the system is being handled. The hillfort art was very well done indeed. Did you draw it yourself? If not, I'd like to know your source for such great material...

✚ I'll agree that it's not a great idea to have violently opposed characters in the same party. However, a certain degree of diversity often lends piquancy to a campaign, I've found; if all the characters are from very similar backgrounds there is less for them to talk about. True, good roleplayers will find ways to interact anyway. But I like to give them the opportunity to take a diverse group and weld it into a real party.

I should make it clear that I don't think that this is *always* the preferred thing to do. Sometimes the PCs should be homogenous. But I like to run both sorts of campaigns, and scenarios such as *The Grey Company* let me do just that.

### **SPECIAL BONUS OFFER!**

For some time I've been searching my mind for a way to induce readers of the promotional issues to subscribe to IR. Finally I've come up with an answer: subscribers to Interregnum will occasionally receive bonus zines along with their regular copy of IR. I have a large number of zines which were published in The Wild Hunt APA; as a matter of policy I've never duplicated material from TWH in IR. Yet the zines contain material which is still of interest, I think: reviews, comedy, writeups, etc., and most readers of IR have not read TWH.

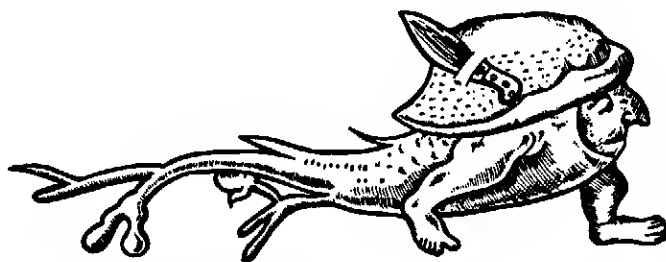
I'll mail copies of the old zines (not attached to IR) only when the additional weight doesn't increase the cost of postage, of course.

I realize that subscribers to TWH already have those zines, of course. I won't burden them with a second copy. However, there is an inducement I can offer to TWHers as well. The traffic on the IR Internet mailing list can be printed up and included on an irregular basis, as traffic warrants.

Any comments or suggestions on this topic will be most welcome.

Until next time,

—>Pete



### **COLOPHON**

The Log That Flies #5 was gestated in a *P. Maranci 30.4 brain*. Much of the text was then written with *PC-Write 2.5*, an ancient but serviceable ~~villain~~ word processor.

The text was formatted for desktop publication using *Publish-It 4.0 for Windows*, a cranky but cheap DTP program.

The DTPed document was printed at a ruinous cost at a laser printing service, on a 300 dpi laser printer.

Most of the art in *TLTF* is taken from books of copyright-free clipart published by the **Dover Publishing Co.** of Mineola, NY. Reviews of various Dover books may be printed in future issues.

The art was copied on a **Kodak 2110** high-speed duplicator.

Help! I'm a prisoner in a Colophon-writing factory! ☹

# Session Notes #19

## Douglas E. Forenby



### Castles Made Of Sand

A number of weeks ago, **F. Bob Mosdal** posed an interesting question. We are in the midst of establishing a new role playing campaign (more on that next month, perhaps), and he was giving lots of thought to a new character concept. What he asked was, "Is theater, film, or television a better model for role playing?" Intriguing, eh? At least I thought it was.

To start out, I'd like to make some caveats and fundamental assumptions clear. First of all, this essay is by no means a comprehensive coverage of the subject. It's more my impressions of some parts of the question that interest me. Since it's a suggested topic, I'm hoping that other people will be including their takes on the question, and perhaps we'll approach comprehensiveness in that manner.

Second, one assumption I want to make explicit is that a critical common feature of all four story-telling modalities (theater, film, TV and RPG) is conflict. I think this is particularly true in the case of RPG, which almost always seems to turn on conflict, whether it is physical violence, attempting to survive against hostile forces of nature, seduction, argument, or what have you. I suppose that it would be possible to create a *Barney*-like RPG game, where everyone sat around singing songs and feeling good about themselves, but I can't imagine too many gamers being interested in it.

Third, I'm only going to make a very limited sample of all the possible examples of the four modalities. There are so many different types of role playing experience, not to mention different films, TV shows, plays (and different productions thereof), no one could hope to do them justice. Think for a moment of the difference between two different versions of the same film. The original *Invasion Of The Body Snatchers* (1956) had a subtext that was redolent of corporate group-think; the Republican man in the grey flannel suit was becoming the only "True American," replacing diversity and individuality just as the pods replaced real people. The remake done in 1979 had the same basic story (plus loads of special effects that weren't present in the original), but the subtext emphasized the then-current *zeitgeist*: can a small group of friends protect themselves from the official indifference/evil plots of the government? Paranoia once again, but with a very different flavor.

Having said all this, what do I want to bring in to the spotlight? I will begin with theater, since that lends itself well to the use of the spotlight. When I was in Vancouver over Victoria Day weekend, I saw

the play *Danny And The Deep Blue Sea* in a small experimental theater in Gastown. It wasn't the best play I've ever seen (although the actors did the best they could with the material), but it brings to the fore many of the strengths and weaknesses of theater. The play consisted of only two roles (a woman and a man) and unfolded in two acts: one set in a neighborhood bar, the other in the woman's bedroom. When I say the theater was small, I'm not exaggerating. It was a sold-out performance, and they had to bring in extra chairs to accommodate the audience. This meant I was sitting only a few feet from the actors. Even though I knew these people were actors, and were simply taking on a role, the immediacy of the setting granted it great emotional power. When two people are screaming and cursing at each other, or slapping each other, right in front of you, the visceral response outweighs the intellectual knowledge that "they're just pretending."

**Buffering:** Technology is not the only way of creating an emotional buffer. Referring to your PC in the third person ("The Solo hides behind the door.") has a similar distancing effect.



Don't call me Harvey!

This is something theater does very well. Even when I've seen plays in larger venues, they still carry a sense of immediacy that film or TV cannot match. In the latter two cases, you're watching two dimensional settings with an inherent buffer between you and what is happening (the movie screen or TV screen), and that creates a feeling of detachment at some fundamental level.

Theater also has shortcomings, many of which are amply illustrated in the small experimental setting. It was largely restricted to the Aristotelian continuities of time and space. We began in a bar, then proceeded to the bedroom just down the block. The only lapse in time (during the intermission) was presumably when the characters were *in flagrante delicto*, and that sort of continuity would have been too much for the B.C. public morality. ☺ This can be effective, but it also limits the types of stories that can be told. How could one create a play derived from Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, jumping from location to location all over the Mediterranean world, and spanning years of time? Illusion is also limited by the structural nature of the theater. We were able to visualize what we needed to in the case of *Danny...*; it doesn't take much to create a believable bar, bedroom, and two emotionally crippled Brooklynites. But could they do a stage version of *Alien*? Or the human/toon interactions of *Who Framed Roger Rabbit*? Some things are best left to the imagination (or Industrial Light & Magic). Plays such as *Harvey* are probably the best example, where there's no attempt to make the *phouka* "real."

This makes a nice segue in to considering film. One of the strong points of film as a story telling modality is the ability to bend and

**Setting:** It often seems to me that all role playing settings are Potemkin villages. Never try to peek behind the sets!



Flying without benefit of an airplane has fascinating connotations as a bit of dream content. It's a pity that players can't "dream in character." It would provide very interesting material for a campaign.

shape reality in ways that the theater cannot. Ever since Jean Luc Goddard revolutionized (or destroyed, as your prejudices incline you) film with the introduction of the jump cut, the continuity of time has no longer been an issue. Film makers, like Kurt Vonnegut's Billy Pilgrim, are free to become "unstuck in time." They have always been keen on roaming the world (or at least their backlots in Hollywood) to move settings from one place to another, often with blinding speed. Things that could only exist in our imaginations are able to come to "life" on the screen, thanks to robotics, special effects, and computerized post-production digital image manipulation. By removing ourselves from the emotional immediacy of the theater, we can have the capacity to manipulate time, place, and "reality" in ways that allow us to tell stories the stage cannot.

Film also allows us to experience the psyches of characters in ways that the stage seldom allows. There is a rich tradition of stage characters pouring out their souls to the audience, but it is done either as an intrusive aside, or in the formal manner of a soliloquy (as Hamlet does so famously in the Shakespeare play). A soliloquy can be moving, but it is also highly artificial. Moreover, it is dependent on language, which isn't always the best way to capture the inner feelings of a character. By way of contrast, consider the Lawrence Kasdan film *Grand Canyon*. Midway through the movie, the character played by Kevin Kline has a dream that reflects the uncertainties he feels about his marriage, friendships, and life. Rather than have him relate the dream to a friend (as would likely be done on the stage), we as filmgoers are allowed to experience the subjective nature of the dream itself. Kline flies through the air above Los Angeles, experiencing both the liberation of flying and the terror of suddenly plummeting towards the ground (the latter a remarkable way of conveying to the audience the loss of control he has experienced in his life). His dream culminates in him hovering outside the apartment window of his legal secretary, who seductively draws back the sheet covering her. As Kline reaches towards the window, it suddenly shatters like a mirror, and he is returned to his own bed, next to his sleeping wife. The visual, surreal imagery provides a way to reveal the guilt, fear, and attraction the character is experiencing, all in a very compelling manner.

The differences between film and TV are beginning to blur at an ever-increasing rate. TV has always been willing to show theatrical films, or to rip off the idea of last year's blockbuster film to make an inferior TV show, but now the current has begun to flow both ways. *Star Trek* began on the small screen and died there, but was reborn in



As production technology begins to "trickle down," we may see some dramatic changes in information technology. According to some analysts, so-called "amateur pornography" (shot and edited with camcorders and limited editing suites) is the largest segment of the adult video market. What will happen when non-corporate users are capable of shooting and mixing digital images, with laser disc-quality output?



film. Now we are experiencing the curious phenomenon of a series (*ST:TNG*) being taken off TV so that the cast can make movies. Curiouser and curiouser, indeed. With widescreen TV, ProLogic receivers, and Dolby Surround sound available for home AV systems, even some of the technical differences are beginning to break down.

One thing that sets TV apart from film is a very important narrative difference. Although there is always the possibility (threat?) of a sequel, films are by and large one-shot affairs. That is, the story has to be self-contained, with a conflict, rising tension, climax and resolution all within the span of 1 to 3 hours. Does anyone recall Ralph Bakshi's ill-fated attempt to create an animated version of *The Lord Of The Rings*? Given the epic length of the work, he had to end the original film part of the way through the trilogy. I can recall vast amounts of muttering by filmgoers leaving the movie because it had no "real" resolution. As a result, the rest of the story was never filmed. TV typically follows the same path (wrapping everything up with a nice homily at the end of the half hour), but there are important exceptions. Soap operas have taken advantage of the serial plot line for years, and some long-running TV shows have developed a sort of "internal history," with recurring characters and references back to previous events. What stand out for me are a small number of shows that used (or use) narrative story arcs as a matter of course. The first (and probably the best) was Steven Bochco's *Hill Street Blues* (his current *NYPD Blue* has similar characteristics), although Brand & Falsey's *St. Elsewhere* and *Northern Exposure* have done the same, as did Zwick and Herskovitz in *thirtysomething*.

Not having to resolve plot lines within 30 minutes or an hour opens up great possibilities for development of both characters and plots. I think back to a certain story arc in *Hill Street Blues* where Daniel J. Travanti's character (a recovering alcoholic) was thinking seriously about going back to drinking. If the temptation had been introduced at the beginning of the hour and been resolved (one way or the other) by the end of the episode, it would have drastically reduced the emotional impact of the struggle. As it played out, more and more things went wrong in the character's life, both professionally and personally, culminating with him discovering his AA sponsor drinking in a bar. With the pressure building over a number of weeks, and Travanti's character moving back and forth between resolve and temptation, it was a major breakthrough when he decided he would not drink, no matter what happened.



One thing that all three of these modalities have in common is that they are scripted. The actor I saw playing Danny wasn't deciding what to say every night any more than Kevin Kline got to decide if he'd have an affair or Daniel J. Travanti would decide if his character relapsed or not. Scripting is the essence of plays, films, and TV shows. TV has probably been the most rigid of the three, with predictable "beats" that are followed as a matter of formula (have to have that strong opening, and the "hook" just before we go to commercial, so that no one changes channels!). It's sad to see that films are rapidly becoming as formulaic as TV shows; the current scriptwriting "bible" in Hollywood specifies the exact *page* on which major plot twists and character conflicts must occur! ☹

Scripting, of course, is anathema to most role playing. Few things infuriate players more than the sense that "...everything is fixed, and you can't change it!"<sup>1</sup> In that sense, none of the three modes of story telling F. Bob suggested are good models, because none of them are interactive and collaborative. There *\*are\** a few points of common ground, however.

When F. Bob first raised the question, my first instinct was to say that theater was the best model. After all, role playing provides an immediacy beyond even the tiny theater I went to in May; a few people sitting around a small table is about as up close and personal as it gets. Moreover, role playing lacks the special effects and finely crafted sets (or location shots) of film or TV. In that way, one would think role playing would be as limited as the theater in the type of stories it could tell.

What I realized after thinking a bit more is that role playing is not bound to continuity of place or time, because the conflict takes place largely in the minds of the participants. In this respect it's more like radio or literature. If we could somehow equate people on artistic ability, I doubt that any two people would come up with the same drawing of a setting or an NPC in a role playing game -- any more than they would for an H.P. Lovecraft description of some "unspeakable horror." In that sense, role playing is better than film or TV, since participants can create special effects as vivid as their imaginations allow.

To my mind, good role playing probably comes closest to an excellent dramatic TV show, of the types I mentioned earlier. The key defining feature is the characters -- characters that you return to week

<sup>1</sup>Jesus to Pontius Pilate in Andrew Lloyd Weber and Tim Rice's *Jesus Christ Superstar*.



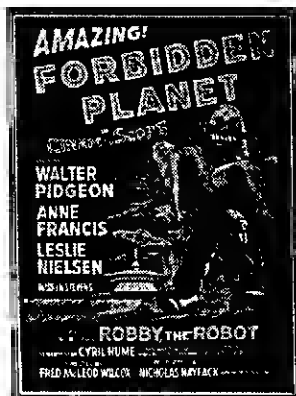
Radio could actually be a decent model for role playing (in some ways), but it hasn't had the formative effect on most gamers that TV has.

after week, largely to see how they will develop, how they will deal with the problems that their environment or relationships present them -- only the path is not defined by a scriptwriter, it's created by your choices. The setting may change (for instance, characters on *Northern Exposure* have gone to Anchorage, Seattle and Grosse Pointe, MI, but they're still the touch-point for the show). Role playing takes advantage of the strength of serial narrative flow found in better TV writing. It also takes the immediacy of emotional impact from theater, and the ability to evoke non-linguistic symbols from film. In short, it is a form of story telling that draws upon modes that came before it, but offers a unique and compelling synthesis of its own.



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## Comments on Interregnum #4

**Maranci:** *RE: Review of Dragon's Lair.* Wow. I guess it really is true that everything old is new again. ☺ I was *not* one of those people who fed infinite amounts of quarters in to DL machines way back when, but it does surprise me that it was converted to CD-ROM format. I guess the demand for material on CD-ROM is great enough that it makes more economic sense to recycle an old arcade product than to do something original, such as *Myst*. Thanks for the detailed review.

**Taylor:** *RE: The M:tG Legends compendium.* I think Joseph Conrad put it best when he said, "The horror. The horror." ☺

**Hoberman:** *RE: Making your campaign kulturny.* An excellent essay and collection of grounding questions for defining cultures. In keeping with our new policy of Comments Lite®, I'd like to reply to some of the issues you raise in an essay in the next issue. Great work!

**Phillies:** RAEBNC

**Collier:** *RE: Political Science 3 paper.* Hmm, Collie. It seems that when I took an international relations/foreign policy class as an undergrad, it was something like PolSci 1011. I shudder at how many more semesters you have to go. ☺ Seriously, the paper was an excellent application of an analytic model to the PBEM game. I suspect I would have taken away more from the paper if I were more familiar with the model, but you deserve Very Many points for originality.

**Robinson:** Welcome to *IR*! I hope you'll continue to provide us with unique, behind-the-scenes views of Pete and Scott. ☺



**Greene:** *RE: How well can one roleplay an "alien"?* That's an excellent question, and one I hope to address in the next essay (cf. comment to **Hoberman**).

**Pili:** *RE: Cyberpunk vs. Post-Holocaust worlds.* When I read your paragraphs comparing the cyberpunk and post-holocaust genera, I had to go back and re-read them to make sure I hadn't inverted the meanings. I did get it right the first time, just didn't believe it. I've reffed several campaigns in both genera and haven't found that either is **inherently** hopeless. My experience has been that players found the post-holocaust setting (both in **Aftermath!** and **Twilight:2000**) to be more repellant than cyberpunk. I attribute part of that to the comment that the style of cyberpunk game I run is out of the ordinary (**F. Bob Mosdal** coined the term, "Dougpunk" ☺). Regardless of the setting, characters do develop goals. Sometimes those are goals I, personally, have little interest in (becoming God Emperor of Cleveland, acquiring a BFG 9000) -- but they're still goals. It may be a matter of adjusting your perceived goal potentials. Harrison Ford's character in **Blade Runner** wasn't able to save the future like Linda Hamilton's character in **The Terminator** (nor did he get to shack up with Michael Biehn ;) -- but he didn't collapse in a heap of existential dread, either. He followed the path of personal integrity and happiness (?) by leaving the city and spending what time he could with Sean Young (a terrible fate, I know...).

By the way.....just when you get your system tweaked just the way you want it, Microsoft will release Chicago. ☺

**Butler:** Welcome to *IR* (though hardly to the world of APAs)! Sky Warriors wins the prize for the most over-the-top (excuse me, I meant to say "radical") LRP I've ever heard of. A perfect submission for the "Technology" issue.

**Dunham:** Welcome also to *IR* (but not to APAs)! Once again I am struck by your creative gifts in taking elements of diverse systems and historical background to create a *gestalt*. I hope you'll share more as the campaign develops.



# REFUGEE # -42

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The contents of this zine include fiction and commentary. I would include *Communications*, Letters to the Editor, in which I publish letters or comments from correspondents, if by some chance I ever received one from the readership.

## Commentationes

*Editorial Page:* Comments are fundamental to the way an APA works. Besides many readers become writers not because they think that they have something to say, but because they want to make some contribution to an ongoing conversation. If I were to receive an extra issue of IR, I would investigate leaving it at the local comic store. An extra copy of the cover would help.

*The Log That Flies:* Sorry about MattMark. Whenever I hear one of these embezzlement stories, I always wonder who was aware of what was happening, and where the money went. I suppose that I am a bit cynical. Your conjurer insert is particularly clever; such persons can play a role even in future societies. No matter how odd the artifact, it can always be a prop for a magic show. (Well, perhaps not quite 'no matter', unless you are very good with your 'hut, officer, I didn't know that this beautiful ceramic turtle is actually a Zograthi planet huster homh.')

*This Shining Sea* was completed, and is now off at publishers, improving my collection of rejection letters (still waiting on number one). After a while, I will have gone through all of the orthodox publishers, all the exotic publishers, and all the people anyone can think of, down to game and comic companies. At that point, I will break the novel into nice digestible 8K chunks, about 100 of them, and begin posting them on a semiweekly basis to rec.arts.comics.creative or the like. In the end, through the grace of the Net, publication in some form is certain, allowing that I do not die of old age first.

Meanwhile, I am starting to work on another superhero novel, which I hope will come to a logical conclusion in a single volume, perhaps even enough of a conclusion that no one will ask for a sequel. I decided not to work on volume 2 of *This Shining Sea* before volume 1 sells. It is not logical. I have some temptation to write the Adara novel, based on the character seen in TWH and A&E, detailing her life among the Timeless Ones, and what happened prior to her departure from that plane. The other alternative involves Moonshadow, a character who appeared in a certain dead Boston campaign. I'll be

interested in opinions. The Moonshadow character would be changed a bit; I would not be reusing other peoples' characters from that campaign.

*Who is John Galt?:* It would appear that AH may revive Runequest a bit. Well, if they see a market, good. Rumor has it that AH will be deemphasizing board games. Now, once upon a time, Monarch Avalon reputedly used board games as the load leveller on their printing facilities. When the facilities would otherwise have stood idle, they were used profitably to make board games. This is fine if the game is simple, and not so fine if the cost of developing the game is high. Its players are grateful for the long article on Money:The Gathering.

*Desert Wind and Secret Signs:* What do you mean, you don't drive a horse? By the way, how do you check the fuel level? With respect to 'there is no evolution of culture', it is worthwhile to read Sorokin (Pitirim Sorokin, Harvard, some decades ago). Sorokin studied cultural dynamics. His findings are much easier to understand if put in modern terms. In essence, he said that cultural evolution is chaotic. (This does not mean that it is random, or hops from point to point; a chaotic evolution is one that can very easily follow very different paths.) He further said that there are strange attractors, i.e. that a civilization's culture is likely to be one of a limited number of types, and that relatively speaking it spends a lot of time near that type, and relatively little time transiting back and forth. Sorokin was a contemporary of Toynbee and Spengler, but is much less well remembered, probably because he said something relatively intelligent.

*Session Notes:* Re Internet. 'Gosh, Bullwinkle, what are we going to do?' 'There's one hope left, Rocky. I'm going to search Internet for intelligence.' 'Gee, Bullwinkle, no one's ever found any there before.' Anyone doubting this observation should consider reading sci.physics, which is overrun with anti-relativists, utter hozos, clueless morons, and the like, not to mention the distinguished Professor Alexander Abian, Ludwig Plutonium (there is a relatively reliable report that this is the man's real name, in the same sense that None Of The Above was the name of a distinguished candidate for Governor of Oregon two years back), and so on.

*unnamed zine:* That was a really well-written term paper. Would the faculty member in charge touch it with a ten foot pole? After all, since it is imaginary, you can say anything you want. You did have many things worked out. It was not necessarily obvious why the Alliance would fall behind the Hegemony, unless the worlds in question were really unfavorable for civilization. The local experience has been that the countries that seriously want to advance, and are not overrun with London School of Economics socialists, Russian imperialists, Spanish mercantilists, etc. manage to catch up, as a tendency, with their more advanced neighbors. The United States was once far poorer than England, but this has not been true for more than a century now.

I take it that your jump point system makes it feasible to blockade the Axis, and the Axis has not yet felt pressed enough to send out sleeper ships into the deep rear of the Hegemony — areas that the Hegemony and Alliance have not yet occupied. This is, after all, one alternative solution to the blockade —

go around it.

You compare the Hegemony with the United Nations, but the Hegemony intervenes in the foreign affairs of its neighbors. I fear that you have touched one of my 'initiate rant' triggers. If you wish to avoid this rant, please skip several paragraphs.

Formally, the United Nations is not supposed to intervene in the internal affairs of its members. However, it managed to invade Somalia, getting into a war with one side. Clinton appears to be trying to persuade the UN to authorize an American invasion of Haiti. etc.

It is perhaps noteworthy that UN conduct during its Somali incursion showed distinct variations from the laws of war. One might propose that the Hegemony, in its interactions with the Alliance and the Axis, would do the same. Let us consider for your campaign some inspiration provided by the real world. In Somalia, private civilians were detained based on political party membership (members of the Aidid faction). A large area (N.Y. Times report), perhaps three blocks deep around the US embassy, was razed to the ground to clear lines of fire. Indiscriminate air attacks (i.e., not directed at a military target visible from the aircraft) were made on a known hospital. The above three acts are war crimes. To add insult to injury, the United States was persuaded to launch a commando attack on an alleged headquarters of the Aidid faction. The attacking company took (source:S&T) 70% casualties. Of course, they had raped into position, taken prisoners, and had an operations plan which apparently assumed that they could walk out, since (from S&T report) they had no alternative means of departure. The US spokesmen then whined that the American forces had been ambushed. Now, an ambush occurs when one walks into a position where no opposition is expected, and gets shot at. We are talking about a headquarters facility in Mogadishu, a city where even the Red Cross (at last report) uses heavily armed guards. The US Force arrived for the purpose of kidnapping civilian non-combatants from the facility. We are now asked to believe that the UN/US forces were surprised when they got shot at. If you believe this, I have some great beachfront resort property on Baffin Island. (Of course, it may be that they were surprised, which does not say much for someone's insight.)

The military attempted to blame the disaster on President Clinton, for denying the Humanitarian relief expedition that well known tool of famine relief, the Tank Company. One notes, however, that the people who ordered the attack did so after learning that they had no American tanks available; they decided to go ahead anyhow. Those people are culpable. Now, of course, they want to blame someone else for their decision. (They did have an armored force available; the Pakistani detachment had previously lost at least one tank to the local civilian population, which is armed with recoilless rifles.) The late Glenn Blacow occasionally argued that sections of our military/political upper echelons are filled with idiots, and the above certainly justifies his belief. None of this, of course, does any good to the widows and orphans of the Americans who were sent into a battle that they lost to the Somali regulated militia (the armed, adult citizenry.)

*My Bonnie Lies:* Welcome to Interregnum, may it rule forever. A truly fine pastiche of immortal writer Peter Maranci.

What more can be said?

*The Eight Track Mind:* Well, a space series set a few centuries in the future, during efforts to terraform Mars, or whatever, sounds interesting, but what is the *plot*? Terraforming is a plot hook, not a plot. Jerry Pournelle explained this difference to me. A plot book is something that makes the story SF, but the bomb whose law setting is 'Planet Buster Bomb', whose intermediate setting is 'The Big Bang', and which about to be detonated on its high power setting is not a plot. The plot is the characters scrambling to be sure that the bomb detonates on time, because they have determined that the Creator is evil, and the only way to stop an infinity of suffering is to take his toy away from him.

I haven't seen Higblander (other than the first movie) and can't comment on your remarks. With respect to Money: The Gathering, the local hobby store ran out of everything within a day after arrival. They did finally manage to keep copies of the original game in stock from Wednesday to Friday, so I saw a set.

*Strange Sands:* Welcome to Interregnum. 'I spend all my time fiddling...' I have graduate students who are fond of windows. It is possible to help them to be cured of this affliction, because they are very sensible people, but my efforts with windows and mice convinced me that they are incredibly less efficient than a keyboard. Of course, you have to be willing to do a certain amount of work yourself to learn things.

wrto Cyberpunk, the machinegun fights are perhaps less boring than the difficulty that the fights are always between the same parties, with the same sides always getting cast as good or as evil. Cyberpunk appears to be an acutely unlikely future. Your scenario was well written, but as a non-RQ player I can't comment further.

*Flight by Committee:* You went up in an airplane? Those aren't scenes from your computer? Hmmh. You do realize that it's Zephyr who can fly, not Butler, don't you? I confess that have low blood pressure. I've had a grey out in a civilian airliner aborting a landing in Albany. (Well, Albany airport does have a mountain beyond the end of a runway.) I must enjoy these events through your wonderful description, vicariously, not at my expense. So, did you enjoy it?

*Reading Companion:* Well written. The sidebars explaining the correlation between the game events and the literary characterization were really useful. In a novel, you don't want to hear the dice rolling. In a writeup demonstrated a set of rules, the die rolls and references are an aid to the reader. wrto yr cts Dana, what a terrible thing to accuse an undoubtedly innocent and virtuous young lady of reading.

# Strange Sands

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## Apologies and Acknowledgements

Well, I should start things off this month with an apology my friend, Dan Johnston. Last issue, I spelled his name incorrectly. All this time, he's been spelling his last name with a "t," and I've been off on Cloud 9. Sorry 'bout that, Dan. Unfortunately, I'm better at remembering inconsequential blather than anything important... :)

Uh, so my comments on technology in Issue #4 were all over the map. Does naming the problem help any? Probably not; I'll end up babbling nonsensically in this issue too. Seriously, though, I'll try to avoid writing my zine at 2 a.m. from now on.



## Human Nature

When Pete mentioned this issue's topic to me, the first thing that came to mind was character alignment. Are people generally good? Naturally evil? Is there even a

typical behavior pattern such as lawful or chaotic that we can ascribe to people, or must we think of each person as an individual who varies from situation to situation?

I had a good friend in California, who told me about a pretty strange incident. He and a friend were out driving around

and were feeling somewhat reckless (this was in his punk rock stage). They were pulling up to a stoplight and stopped next to a car with an elderly couple. As the light turned green, Mark leaned out the window and yelled, "Die, old people!" as they pulled away. The woman in the passenger seat turned around. She was wearing a respirator.

Mark tells the story with much sobriety today, and says he felt truly horrible afterwards. This doesn't really make it any better; I asked myself whether his actions would have been any less reprehensible if the woman had not been wearing the respirator. The answer was no.

Despite all this, Mark is a great friend, and I would never call him an "evil" person for having done such an act. Stupid and callous maybe, but not evil. Having committed my own share of malicious deeds, I cannot presume to judge. This particular act, however, was "out of character" for Mark. Of all the people I know, he is one of the most thoughtful, intelligent and kind people I've ever met. Not exactly an AD&D paladin, but a decent Ranger, maybe.

Contrary to what a lot of people have said recently about TSR, I always found the alignment system to be a nice starting point for getting a handle on my character. I never found the system especially restrictive, probably because I never played with rules lawyers in my D&D days. What I did find was that alignment helped me think of the way my character acted in normal circumstances and under no pressure. It was the benchmark. What the rules never defined and that I subsequently found out, was that there was a *lot* of leeway within that general definition. One of the most entertaining characters I ever played was a rather obsessed (and stupid) paladin, who didn't think twice about killing anything evil right on the spot. Never mind if the creature possessed useful information! He had this habit of rushing into rooms swinging his sword while the rest of the party was still

formulating a plan; he ended up being rescued more than once.

I suppose I think of characters in terms of motivation first, and then apply the appropriate "alignment." For my paladin, his primary motivation was destroying all evil from the face of the earth. Rather ambitious, but for an obsessed character perhaps not unbelievable. The alignment "lawful good" was his behavior when he was not near anything patently "evil." Since, in AD&D, creatures are defined by their alignment, it was relatively easy to know when someone was, at their base, an "evil" creature. However, if someone committed a base act, would my paladin have been alerted? This is where it gets tricky. He may have condemned the act, but it was doubtful that he would destroy a person based on one sin. And so alignment has more to do with basic human nature than with day-to-day acts—*"alignment" is based on a consistent pattern of behavior, i.e. the way a person behaves most of the time.*

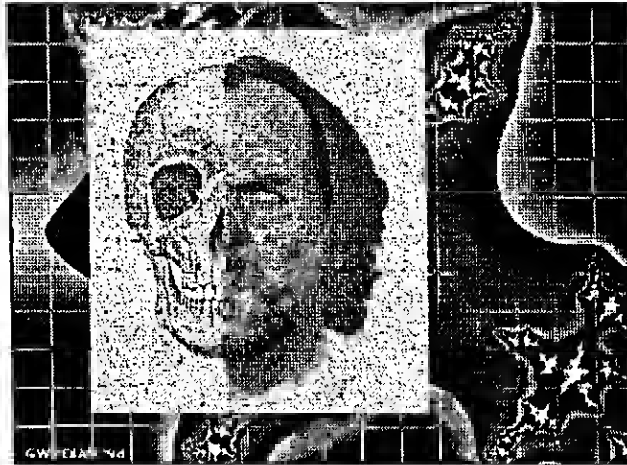
Does this mean that if, most of the time, O.J. Simpson was a nice guy, and just once, he committed murder, he was "good?" Of course not. But what we must take into account are the basic nature of the person. Was the basic nature a nice guy, or was it really a wife-abuser? Using an alignment system means burning through all the masks and finding the core motivation, the thing that drives all else. I happen to think that O.J. is a great *runner*, in every sense of the word.

Of course, there are many more interesting motivations than "destroying all evil." Here's a few off the top of my head:



- To find a replacement for a dead parent, whether it be an institution or a specific person
- To defend the meek
- To regain the trust of a betrayed institution or individual
- To become rich
- To avenge the death or destruction of an institution or individual
- To escape (physically and/or mentally) from an institution or individual
- To settle down and live a normal family life
- To make people laugh (or sometimes, get them mad)
- To have lots of sex. :)

There's lots more; it just takes a little thought. The final step, of course, is deciding why the motivation exists. Some of it may be purely biological, but there's also usually a good reason why people behave they do. What were the events that spawned the behavior? If a parent is removed at early age, there will be a resulting void felt by a child. They may spend the rest of their lives trying to fill it. If a character is repeatedly bullied, perhaps for a physical defect, the character may grow up feeling a need to protect the downtrodden. Another person might avoid bully types completely, never overcoming the fear.



There are, of course, numerous ways to approach the personality of a character as you create. Sometimes I envision the way a character looks and proceed from that point. Other times, I have a certain motivation in mind, and come up with a "look" that fits with that motivation. And sometimes, I go from the top down and give the character an alignment before anything else.

One last thing I like to do when I create a character is juxtapose two conflicting motivations. Perhaps the character who

wants a stable family life also has a strong urge to travel and adventure, and so his dream is constantly under seige, not only by outside forces, but also by his own behavior. This inner conflict makes for a more dramatic and interesting personality.

Finally, break the rules and do the unexpected.

### *Strangers in Prax*

The new RuneQuest supplement made it into my hot little hands this month, and, for the most part, it's pretty good. The supplement focuses on three groups of newcomers to the plains of Prax and provides a collection of scenarios based on each of them. The approach is unique in

that the personality of each of these individuals is the primary force behind each of the scenarios.

"The Lunar Coders" detail a group of Lunar enforcers who report directly to the emperor and have arrived in Prax for reasons unknown. "Barran the Monster Killer" is an obvious knock-off of Captain Ahab, a fanatical follower of Magasta and dedicated sea monster hunter. "Arlaten the Magus" is the first Gloranthan sorcerer to appear in an adventure, or in Prax for that matter. Each group write-up has a selection of short adventure hooks to introduce the characters and one or two longer adventures once the NPCs have been established.

The most difficult aspect of running a group of strong, well-defined NPCs is the chance that the PCs will be overshadowed. Watching as a group of powerful NPCs take charge of a situation can be, as one of the authors states in the supplement, "as fun as doing laundry." Of all the scenarios, only "The Lunar Coders" seems to have fallen too far into that category. Each of the NPCs are incredibly powerful, and (more distasteful) squeaky clean. That's right. Lunars who are so goody-goody, most characters will be overcome more by bland righteousness than anything else. Add to it the fact that the main scenario for the Coders has the PCs being overrun by these red-caped superheroes, and you have a somewhat unbalanced (and unfun) start to things. This sounds a bit harsh, but I hate it when scenarios try to impress characters with the might of the NPCs by beating them over the head with the fact. Actually the Coders are not a lost cause; with a bit of tinkering, they can even be interesting. The

characters do possess depth; it's just that it gets lost in the Lunar crusade and the godlike posturing. Although each of the Coders have an interesting history, those backgrounds aren't fully exploited or developed, and human flaws are left vague. I would have liked a scenario that brings characters into contact with the Coders for more personal reasons.

Things get better, though. "Barran the Monster Killer's" seaborne adventures are designed with unexpected twists in mind. "The Sea Princess" is the first scenario where characters get a chance to meet the maniacal captain, and it is here where they'll learn just how far Barran will go to get his prize. The main scenario, "Belly of the Eel" takes an even more radical course, and depending on how the GM plays Barran, players may come to love or hate the wildman. I kept imagining Barran showing up as a recurring NPC, each adventure with him more inextricably disastrous than the last.

"Arlaten the Magus" documents the arrival of the first sorcerer in Pavis, shortly after the Giant's Cradle adventure in the 2nd edition Pavis campaign pack. The scenario deals nicely with the reaction to Arlaten's arrival in the city, and then continues with the magus' attempt to establish himself within the Big Rubble. Again, characters may feel something like second-class citizens in comparison to the might of a sorcerer, but here the characters have more stake in the outcome than with the Coder scenarios. The big showdown in the Rubble makes for one of the more epic Gloranthan battles.

Overall, these are a good set of scenarios, and with a bit of tinkering can be made enjoyable—just don't pummel the characters with the NPCs too much and avoid sounding like Christopher Reeve when you play Count Julian, the leader of the Coders.

### Gil's Movie Opinions (*Watch Out, Siskel & Ebert!*)

Summer movies are in full swing, and we made it out to a few this year. First on the list was *Wolf* with Jack Nicholson. This one was lots of fun, and focused more on the beast within than on the typical special effect vehicle. That was a wise choice because it gave the film makers the opportunity to work the corporate angle to good effect. Jack gave a serious acting performance (as opposed to just playing himself) this time around, and he's got some very funny lines. Recommended.

*The Lion King* was not quite as wonderful as I thought it would be. After reading the reviews, I was prepared for something fantastic. Instead, I got a fairly standard plot and some mediocre music. That's not to say it was abysmal. The art itself was truly awe-inspiring. Both the beginning sequence where each of the animals gather together to pay tribute to Simba, the heir to the cat-throne, and the death of the king amid a stampeding herd were beautifully rendered. I just wish it wasn't quite so predictable; it suffered in the same way *Willow* did.

*The Shadow* was also something of a disappointment. Again, all special effects and very little in the way of plot or

character. When will movie makers learn that we care more about the people, not how fantastic the sets are? Alec Baldwin's performance was, like his character, rather bland. Give the producers credit for some good special effects and a nice flair for the pulp setting, but not much else.

On another note, *Red Rocks West* turned out to be pretty darn good. Starring Nicolas Cage and Dennis Hopper, it's film noir playing at your local art house theater. Cage plays an out-of-work drifter who's hoping for a job in Colorado. The job falls through, and he ends up in a town called Red Rocks, where he's mistaken for a hit man hired by a local bartender to kill his wife. From there, things get stranger. Great fun.

### Endnotes

A couple of things to toss out here as we break up this month. I was thinking about a few topics for future issues, and thought I'd pass them along for Pete to add to his list:

- Settings (time and place, and why we choose one over another)
- Villains (who they are, why they do what they do, etc.)
- GMing styles and tips.
- The Perfect Gaming Session (as a player, as a GM. What's needed to accomplish it?)



## Interregnum #4

### The Log That Flies

It's tough to write adventures in general; having a flaky coordinator can only make it more so. Glad you kept things written down. :) I liked the Conjuror best. What if he manipulates the party into helping him with his spy mission, forcing them into a really nasty situation...? • *Dragon's Lair* was the most popular game at the local arcade for about a year. I usually managed to get about halfway through before dying. Having tried it at your place on the PC, I can only say I've gotten rusty. :( I loved watching it though; glad it's still alive.

### Who Is John Galt?

The Soldiers of the Red Moon RuneQuest supplement sounds great. Glad the Lunars are finally getting a bit more attention. I'll send my two cents along to Joseph Scott. • Sorry I'm not as much a collector of *Magic: The Gathering* cards as other people, but the game is so popular, your write up should prove very useful to a lot of people. I have fun playing, but lately, I'm getting a little burned out. • Why are your players afraid of Call of Cthulhu? Real heroes should be willing to sacrifice themselves (or their sanity) for the greater good. Here's their chance! :)

### The Skeleton Key

I enjoyed your discussion of other cultures. It's pretty tough to play a truly alien culture (witness the popularity of oriental roleplaying) unless you're willing to do a bit of work. You set out a great set of guidelines and questions. I suppose the most difficult decision for the GM comes when he must decide how much time a party will spend among a certain culture. Once you've invested hours writing up information, you hope it will be interesting enough to keep PCs there for awhile!

### Session Notes

I tend to agree with your assessment of *Magic: The Gathering*. Burnout is creeping in, and the feeling reminds me a little of the phase I went through after playing *Star Fleet Battles* all weekend long for six months. After awhile, you begin to think only of collecting more cards to improve your deck. I prefer the interaction of roleplaying, although I still enjoy *MtG* as a time filler. • Since you asked, I'm currently running a 1920's Call of Cthulhu campaign and playing in a Victorian-era adventure campaign using the CoC rules as a guidelines. • Duct tape is similar in value to gum. It can be used for just about anything. :)

### Refugee

It's not my background that's especially interesting; the relatives are the ones who went through all the craziness. I'm just glad to still be around to tell about it! :)

### Tha Unnamed Zine

Interesting way of examining international relations. I had no idea Dave's PBEM was so intricate. I'm generally pretty ignorant when it comes to political science; hats off to you for laying out a clear understanding!

### Afflatus

Hmm, "timid lust for power!" We'll have to keep an eye on that Maranci guy... :) • I truly enjoyed "Maranci's Public" though I didn't understand it one bit. That's not as contradictory as it sounds. The fact that it was a dream explains much, though. I especially liked the spiders "spilling out of the wreckage." Very visual, very bizarre. Great!

### The Eight Track Mind

An interesting tack to try for a magical roleplaying game: no two spells are ever the same. Perhaps the basic affects are the same, but there's always those little side-effects that creep in. This would be a nice way of differentiating magic and technology. I tend to think this way because I believe that the goals of magic and technology are quite different. Technology makes our physical lives easier, while magic eases our spiritual state. • I liked the idea of immortals as god pieces. This is the sort of campaign I wouldn't mind playing. What if, as the immortals are joined they create a physically and spiritually larger being? A very bizarre twist that would be perfect for a Glorantha adventure.

### Flight by Committee

A very entertaining ride through the sky. You had me on the edge of my seat wondering if the stomach would make it! :) Paint ball sounds pretty tame now, actually...

### Reading Companion

Can't help but love the Orlanthe. Deceptively simple folk who have this wonderful strength about them. A nice introduction to your campaign and Glorantha's bestest and brightest. • Having played in your Pendragon Pass game at RQ Con, I can say the rules work surprisingly well. Very quick and intuitive. • Thanks again for your comments on "Guardian Spirit."

## WHO IS JOHN GALT? #5

## Looters beware!

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## RUNEQUEST DAILY BULLETIN

Below is the subscription guidelines for the RuneQuest Daily Bulletin. It is an electronic mailing list for discussing the RQ game and the game world of Glorantha. It is sent out once per day in digest format. Many of the BIG NAMES in RQ are frequent contributors...MOB, Sandy Petersen, etc.

Send submissions and follow-up to  
<RuneQuest@Glorantha.Holland.Sun.COM>;  
they will automatically be included in a next  
issue.

Please include a Subject: line. Articles without it will be ignored, returned, or delayed.

Selected articles may also appear in a regular Digest. If you want to submit articles to the Digest only, contact the editor at <RuneQuest-Digest

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## COMMENTS ON INTERREGNUM # 4

**Note:** I have been extremely busy this past month and have not had time to fully digest the contents of *IR #4*. If I do not mention your zine below, it is for this reason, not because I did not like it or have any comments on it.

### George Phillies:

2 I can't resist any more. What is the logic behind your zine numbering system?

**Douglas E. Jorenby:**

2 re shelling out more money to get a competitive MtG deck: I believe that this is true, to an extent. You will get to a point where more money does not get you that much better of a deck. Once this point is reached, you may make additional purchases to buy specific cards to build a specific type of deck, but this does not necessarily make your deck any stronger. Just different.

Also, remember that this is a collectable game, similar to sports trading cards. A closer analogy is POGs, but with each POG having a power. (Gee, you hit my Fog POG...your Slammer just turned into a mist and you don't get any of those POGs.)

re zero-sum: I am not the most experienced MtG player, but most games that I have seen do not actually play for ante...can anyone tell me of their experiences in this.

Team/multi-player games are played with this game. This leads to some cooperation between players...as well as a ganging up on others. (Lets get Ned...he is to powerful with that red/deck of his.)

Even though it is a zero-sum game when determining the winner(s) and loser(s), I still take away a positive experience when I lose. I don't play for ante. I learn something when I play. I have fun when I play. (As far as I am concerned this is the important thing...if we didn't have fun, then what is the point?)

**David Dunham:**

2 I am wondering what you use to determine adulthood in this campaign. Is it initiation in an Orlanthi cult or is it just age? The reason I ask is to determine when the PCs in your game get the use of their clan's HeroQuest ability.

2 I enjoyed your HeroQuest. Did you use any specific source for inspiration?



# PERSONAL INFORMATION

Name Pelor Rator

Religion(s) Issaries Trader Prince/Orlanth Adventurous Initiate

Race	Human	Height	Family Merchant
Sex	Male	Weight	Tarsh Refugees
Birthdate		Build	
Age	27	Eyes	Occupation
Homeland	Boldhome	Hair	Merchant
Culture	Civilized	Voice	

## DESCRIPTION

# PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS

Current	Original	Maximum		
STR 17	STR 15	STR 17	Hit Points	16
CON 17	CON 17	CON 17	Fatigue	34
SIZ 14	SIZ 14	SIZ 14	Magic Points	18
INT 17	INT 17	INT 17		
POW 18	POW 12	POW 21		
DEX 19	DEX 13	DEX 20	DEX SRM	2
APP 14	APP 14	APP 21		

## SKETCH

# COMMUNICATION

Bonus
13

Spoken Languages	
Sartarite	100
Trade	110
Storm	85
Aldryami	35
Act (00)	0
Bargain (05)	80
Bribe (05)	18
Debate (05)	18
Fast Talk (05)	40
Intimidate (05)	18
Orate (05)	50
Sing (05)	18

# KNOWLEDGE

Bonus
7

Written Languages	
Sartarite	30
Trade	100
Storm	17
Aldryami	35
Disguise (05)	12
Evaluate (05)	93
First Aid (10)	110
Martial Arts (00)	0
Scout (30)	37
Shiphandling (05)	12
Streetwise	
Treat Disease (05)	105
Treat Poison (05)	110
Craft (10)	
Masonry	40

# MAGIC

Bonus
20

Ceremony (05)	105
Enchant (00)	105
Summon (00)	105
Intensity (00)	0
Duration (00)	0
Range (00)	0
Multispell (00)	0

# SPELLS KNOWN

Points

Heal	6
Glue	1
Protection	4
Countermagic	4
Spirit Screen	2

# AGILITY

Bonus
9

Acrobatics (05)	14
Climb (40)	50
Dance (10)	19
Dodge (15)	50
Jump (25)	60
March (05)	14
Ride (05)	40
Run (05)	14

# MANIPULATION

Bonus
20

Catch (15)	35
Conceal (05)	55
Devise (05)	40
Drive (05)	25
Sleight (05)	40
Swim (15)	35
Throw (25)	45
Play (00)	

# PERCEPTION

Bonus
15

Feel (10)	25
Listen (25)	90
Scan (25)	90
Search (25)	50
Smell (05)	20
Taste (05)	20
Track (05)	85

# Analyze Magic

Lock X2

Spell Teaching

Passage

Path Watch

Create Market

Spell Trading

Worship Issaries

# STEALTH

Bonus
-3

Hide (10)	90
Sneak (10)	45



Move 3 m/SR

9

+ 1 d4
--------

34

2

2

4

Defense	10
---------	----

H.P. 16

SHIELD	Heater	Damage	1d6+1d4
Attack	<u>55</u>	CT 3	SP 11 <u>FM 99</u> SR <u>7</u>
Parry	<u>105</u>	CT 5	SP 21 <u>FM 00</u> AP <u>12</u>

WEAPON	Bastard	Sword	Damage	1d10+1+1d4
Attack	110	CT 6	SP 22 <u>FM OO</u>	SR 6
Parry	95	CT 5	SP 19 <u>FM OO</u>	AP 18

WEAPON	Quarter	Staff	Damage	1d8+1d4
Attack	<u>9 5</u>	CT 5	SP 19 <u>FM OO</u>	SR <u>5</u>
Parry	<u>7 5</u>	CT 4	SP 15 <u>FM OO</u>	AP <u>1 2</u>

WEAPON	Kick	Damage	1d6+1d4
Attack	<u>7 5</u>	CT 4 SP 15	<u>FM 00</u> SR <u>7</u>
Parry		CT 0 SP 0	<u>FM 96</u> AP

WEAPON		Damage			
Attack	CT 0	SP 0	FM 96	SR	
Parry	CT 0	SP 0	FM 96	AP	

WEAPON		Damage			
Attack	CT 0	SP 0	FM 96	SR	
Parry	CT 0	SP 0	FM 96	AP	

WEAPON	Damage				
Attack	CT 0	SP 0	FM 96	SR	
Parry	CT 0	SP 0	FM 96	AP	

WEAPON		Damage			
Attack	CT 0	SP 0	FM 96	SR	
Parry	CT 0	SP 0	FM 96	AP	

WEAPON	Damage			
Attack	CT 0	SP 0	FM 96	SR
Parry	CT 0	SP 0	FM 96	AP

WEAPON		Damage			
Attack	_____	CT 0	SP 0	FM 96	SR _____
Parry	_____	CT 0	SP 0	FM 96	AP _____

WEAPON		Damage			
Attack	CT 0	SP 0	FM 96	SR	
Parry	CT 0	SP 0	FM 96	AP	

MISSILE		Javelin	Damage		1d10+1d2	
Attack	95	CT 5	SP 19	FM 00	SR	2
Parry	14	CT 1	SP 3	FM 97	AP	

MISSILE		Damage			
Attack	CT 0	SP 0	FM 96	SR	2
Parry	CT 0	SP 0	FM 96	AP	

MISSILE		Damage			
Attack	CT 0	SP 0	FM 96	SR	2
Parry	CT 0	SP 0	FM 96	AP	

Head  
AP13  
HP 5

L Arm  
AP 13  
HP 4

Chest  
AP 13  
HP 6

R Arm  
AP 13  
HP 4

Abdomen  
AP 13  
HP 5

L Log  
AP 13  
HP 5

R Leg  
AP 13  
HP 5

Melee	Area	Missile
19-20	Head	20
16-18	L Arm	18-19
13-15	R Arm	16-17
12	Chest	11-15
9-11	Abdom	7-10
5-8	L Leg	4-6
1-4	R Leg	1-3

## EQUIPMENT

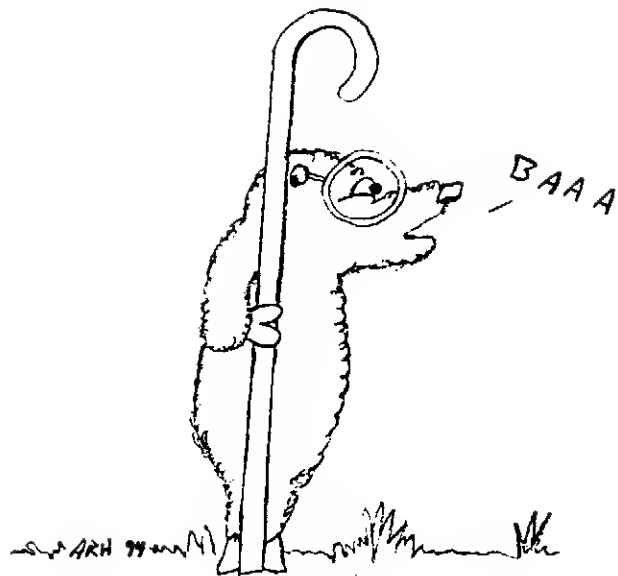
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TOTAL ENC

**Current    Fatigue**



# Shepherd's Pie

slice #1

© Andrew R. Howes July 1994

390 North Avenue  
Rockland, MA 02370

Shepherd: To herd, guard or care for.

The use of the name of any product with or without mention of trademark status should not be construed as a challenge to such status.

## Human Nature

*An elven priest, a ranger and a paladin were galloping over grasslands when they crested one of the many rolling hills of the area. They reared their horses at the top of the slope when they saw a man riding hard across their path with several farmers chasing him. The elven priest and the ranger raised their bows and fired.*

Knowing what has been stated, who would you shoot and why?

*This is the dilemma that confronted the paladin. He protested the uninformed killings, but felt helpless to stop the*

*slaughter as these companions were his friends. The arrows were true and all the farmers were killed as they charged the unexpected bushwhackers.*

*The man that was being pursued, remained unharmed and confronted the trio. After a brief one-sided story that could not be challenged by the farmers, the man was accepted by the elven priest and the ranger. The paladin remained disturbed.*

What made the elven priest and the ranger kill as they did?

For starters they were player characters in an AD&D game. The referee, in this campaign, rewarded players mostly for killing and marginally for role playing. Thus, killing in this campaign was an easy choice.

Second, the chased man was a new player's character that was being introduced. Somehow, in most game systems, players have an uncanny empathy that transcends logic and the virtue of being good. It is understood that evil acts are okay if it means saving a buddy, even if you have not met him in the game yet.

Well, as the story goes:

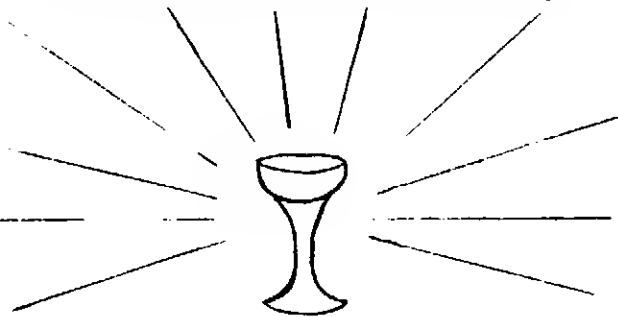
*The paladin wished to know the intentions of the farmers and if their cause was just. He stated that the four of them should follow the horses back to the farmers' homes, to find the truth. The chased man strongly objected, while the elven priest and the ranger passed the truth off as trivial and unnecessary. The paladin had little choice, but to find out the truth for himself, so he separated from the other three.*

*That night, as the paladin slept in the grassland alone with the grazing horses nearby, a large orc crept up and attacked. In the moonless night, the paladin had no chance and was quickly dispatched.*

This was an effective administrative control measure used by the referee to kept the party from splitting, but decency was laid to rest. No more in that campaign would

decency be the norm. The creatures encountered were lined up like an arcade game, and the players mowed through them as best they could to rack up the experience points.

Game designs have come a long way since Gygax developed the archaic (or classic) D&D system. Human nature has been focused on, and it is good to say that some game systems actually reward the good side of human nature. Too bad these systems are not as universally well known or played. Seems its not as much fun to role play characters with a sense of human decency.



### The Holy Grail

The player with the paladin would have had little trouble in the game had he read T. H. White's account of the quest for the holy grail. Pages 435-470 in The Once and Future King would have been enough. (Admittedly, Monty Python's version is by far more fun and quotable).

As can be seen in this tale, paladins and generally good people do not have to nose around in other people's business in order to maintain virtue. It is sufficient to maintain apathy when other characters commit evil acts, as long as the "goody-two-shoes" does not participate.

Throughout history, apathy has been okay among good common folk. People were responsible for their own actions and that was that. Only when our society's radical, liberal, change-the-world people came onto the scene, did apathy go out of vogue.

The quest for the holy grail starts out with King Arthur having conquered England and beyond and his 200± knights of the round table having nothing to do. To keep the rowdy lot from tearing up Camelot, he sent them across the English Channel to cause trouble throughout Europe. Of the 200± that quested, 100± died and 96± retired often severely injured without a clue on how to find the grail.

The knights that failed outright were less than virtuous. They loved the sport of knighthood and killed for glory and entertainment. They were like your typical player characters in RPG's.

Only four of Arthur's knights succeeded in varying degrees in the quest to find the holy grail. These were Galahad, Percivale, Bors and Lancelot.

Sir Galahad, Lancelot's bastard son, grew up as a mama's boy in a convent. He spent every second of his life learning to be a saintly knight. Few knights liked him because his sheltered life made him a social misfit. For role playing he is boring. Check this out: he spurned Guenever's advances. Would any male player character do that? I think not. Though Galahad makes the ideal good character (or paladin) his actions go overboard. There is plenty of room to be less than perfectly good and still be virtuous as the other 3 successful knights show.

Sir Percivale, the son of King Pellinore (of the Questing Beast), was a young knight and a virgin like Galahad. This innocence was preserved in a desert when he rejected the seduction of a beautiful lady. What a cad. Well that's about all he had to do to find the grail. There were a few fights, but he had to be saved by Galahad in all of them.

Sir Bors, Lancelot's cousin, sowed his wild oats a bit and still found the holy grail. He had to work harder than Galahad and Percy, but he survived the quest on his morals. To prove his morals he had to confess, do penance, and abstain from sex and killing while hunting the grail.

Bors' first trial was to rescue a maiden from a knight called Sir Pridam. He won the battle, but would not kill him. Instead, he squealed for Pridam to yield as he swatted his cheeks with the flat of his blade. Pridam yielded to the torture.

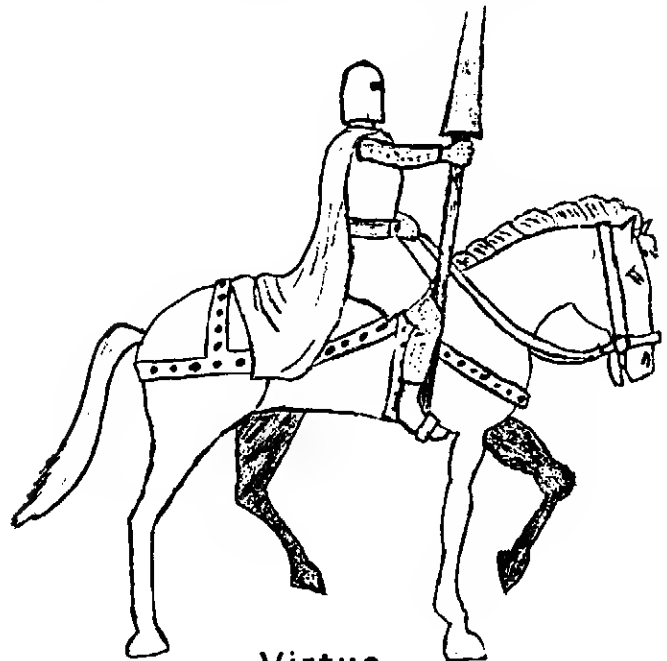
His second trial involved his brother, Sir Lionel, and a maiden in distress. He had to choose between saving his brother from being whipped to death and saving a virgin from being raped. Bors saved the maiden and Lionel was left for dead by his captors. Bors later delivered Lionel's body to an abbey for burial.

The third trial for Bors is memorable. Every time I hear the scenario in a RPG where someone demands a ransom or attempts to blackmail, I remember this trial. (It also gives enlightenment to the phrase: "I don't deal with terrorists.") A priest told Bors that a beautiful maiden would die for love unless Bors made love to her. Bors figured that he was responsible only for his own actions and not those of others. Thus, he refused the lady. The lady then climbed the highest tower with 12 other women and threatened that she would force them all to jump off at once if Bors refused a second time. All 12 ladies cried and wept and pleaded for Bors to save them. He let them jump.

Bors' fourth trial involved Bors' brother Lionel again. Seems Sir Lionel was not dead. He recovered and set out to demand an explanation from his brother. Bors explained that he figured his brother was a dirty dog anyways so he should save the better party, the maiden. Lionel was furious and murderous. He demanded a fight and when Bors refused, he stepped forward to kill him anyways. Bors asked for mercy from his knees. Lionel kicked him down and set his stance to cut off his head. Just then, a hermit ran from a chapel and covered Bors' body. Bors let Lionel kill the hermit. Next, Sir Colgreance of Gore arrived and interceded. Sir Lionel pummeled Colgreance to the ground. As Colgreance called out to Bors, "why do you let me die for you," Lionel killed him. (Seems Galahad could have let Percy die instead of saving

him). Lionel then went to Bors to slay him. Bors held his shield over his head and prayed. God interceded, the brothers made up and the magical, holy boat came to bring Bors to the holy grail.

Sir Lancelot was King Arthur's commander-in-chief. At a young age he fell in love with Arthur's ideas and dedicated his youth to training to be the best. He was a virgin until Elaine tricked him into bed by posing as Guenever. By Elaine he had Galahad who he rejected and he started his secret romance with the real Guenever. He was less than perfectly good, but was allowed a measure of success in the quest for the holy grail. You can read all about Lancelot's adventures, but in the end he was aloud to stand at the doorway to the chapel that held the holy grail. Being held at sword point, he was allowed to look in on a mass being held by Joseph of Arimathea. Galahad, Percivale, and Bors were in attendance. Nine other knights from all of Europe were there along with Percivale's sister, who sacrificed herself to save Galahad, Percivale and Bors from a battle that might have killed them.



**Virtue**

These exploits show that virtue does not come naturally to humans. Some of us just stumble onto it while most of us have to strive hard for it. This is especially

difficult for us, because there is no tangible reward for being virtuous. There is no holy grail for us to find.

Human nature is diverse. We as individuals can choose to do or become anything. Hopefully we are taught as children that virtue is a good quality to strive for and it brings harmony and happiness to our own lives and those around us. With the demise of religious institutions (partly by their own fault), society has less of a positive influence these days. Therefore, we are left with influences dominated by hate and greed.

The tail of the quest for the holy grail also shows that virtue has several different forms. Each knight that saw the grail was different and had different ideas about virtue. Galahad was saintly, Percy was innocent, Bors was dogmatic and Lancelot was repentant. Furthermore, there were 9 other knights and a lady with the grail. Each, no doubt, having displayed virtue in a different way.

The ingredients for virtue change with time also. For example, chastity was a necessity for virtue when this tale was written. Nowadays, I'm sure that chastity is not so important. On the flip side, committing violence was no big deal in the tale, but is out and out wrong today. Galahad knocked down all comers and Bors slapped his adversary into submission. Furthermore, while Percivale and Bors lamented that the 3 of them had killed adversaries on the quest and would not get to find the grail, Galahad said all was okay because killing non-Christians was okay with God. I believe that most people, Christians or otherwise, see this a lot differently today, especially with the holocaust in hindsight. (No shame on White, he retold the story in 1939 and didn't know the evil he was endorsing. At least I hope).

### Bringing It Together

It's up to the players to play as they wish. The referee can set guidelines as to what is taboo or evil, but as a friend once told me, good and evil in the game are determined by

today's standards. In other words, keep it simple, so there is a common understanding among the players and the game remains enjoyable. If that means "kill them all and let God sort them out," and the referee is in the game, so be it. If the referee is incapable of rewarding a good character that displays virtue, and this bothers the player, then it's time for the player to trade the game, the referee or the character for something else.

In the story of the paladin, he was not wrong for not stopping his friends from murdering the farmers or for seeking the truth. This was simply his personality. He could have tried to stop his friends' murderous acts or ignored the situation altogether. As long as he committed no evil, then his virtue remained intact. Like Sir Bors, the paladin was responsible for only his own actions.

### Post Script

It's good to be on board Interregnum. You guys put together a fine piece of 'zine. I hope my few words fit in. Well, I'm in a bit of an interregnum myself this summer and have some time to write. Hopefully, I'll have time to serve up another slice for #6.

Exerts from the Quest for the Holy Grail are from:

T.H. White. The Once and Future King. Berkley Books, New York. 1980.



# Tales from the Electric Underground

Issue #1, Vol. 1

© 1994, Dale Meier

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## IN THIS ISSUE:

First Things First

Surfing the HoloNet

Is White Wolf Going Too Far?

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## FIRST THINGS FIRST

Being a college student and living in Iowa makes it a bit difficult for a gamer to find both time to play and a group to play in. Nevertheless, I decided to follow up on one of my dreams--getting something published in a magazine. Granted, things get a bit hairy when your dream turns into a graduation requirement (I have to build a senior portfolio for my Mass Communication major), but it doesn't seem so bad when you actually enjoy it. My hobbies are listening to Christian Contemporary Music and movie soundtracks, science fiction and fantasy literature, comic books, computers, and of course RPGs. I guess living on a farm for 15 years of my life really shaped my hobbies. I grew up accustomed to going to church and reading fantasy and science fiction literature. Even though I had a lot of allergies and couldn't help my dad out with the farm work, I still felt a bond with the land--not really an agricultural bond, but more of a (Christian) spiritual bond. Later on, my love of science fiction and fantasy led me to gaming.

I entered the hobby in junior high through D&D. After a year, I started hearing all the claims and arguments against roleplaying games. Being a Christian (I'm a member of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America) and 14, I was a bit confused and concerned, so I dropped RPGs and switched to wargames, mainly FASA's The Last Starfighter and Star Trek games. After about a year of wargaming I discovered Star Wars: The Roleplaying Game and was lucky to receive the first edition rulebook for Christmas. Through high school I tried to educate my peers about RPGs in hopes of forming a group, but alas and alack, a majority of them watched too much "Geraldo". My interests later expanded to include Paranoia, Gamma World (fourth edition), Toon, Hunter Planet and Battletech. Soon after that, I picked up on the anti-gaming banter again and became a member of the CAR-PGa (Committee for the Advancement of Role-Playing Games). Presently, I scan the Internet for any kind of thread dealing with the anti-RPG movement and anything else that might be of interest to the Committee (this summer turned out to be a real bear with all the goings on in Canada).

group to play in. During my freshman year at Buena Vista College, I refereed my first game--Toon. After that, I GM'ed Paranoia once and I have hopes of running a few games of Star Wars and Battletech this summer with some friends. *Tales from the Electric Underground* isn't going to be a one shot 'zine so I can start my senior portfolio. I'll be putting out other issues on a sporadic basis (balancing a summer job, this 'zine and another writing project isn't easy) which will probably be a bit more sporadic once I start school again in the fall. I realize that the article in this issue probably doesn't fit the theme. It was meant for issue #4, but after some restructuring and a total rewrite I knew that I wasn't going to get it in on time. Anyhow, here's the first issue of *Tales from the Electric Underground*. I hope you enjoy it.

## SURFING THE HOLONET

*Grif stabbed away at the terminal's keyboard while his partner, Brin, kept watch around the corner. Grif muttered a bit to himself as he tried to access the garrison's main database. He hated working without a spike or even a stolen rank cylinder, but the mission called for stealth, and so they left the base with only the bare essentials.*

>>LEVEL ONE ACCESS GRANTED<<

>CDIR/SEC/DETSECT1138a

>>ENTER EXECUTIVE PASSCODE<<

*Brin's loud whispers grated on the slicer's nerves. "Grif--pssst! Hey, Grif! We have company!"*

*Grif peeked around the corner and saw two stormtroopers conversing in the adjacent intersection. It was clear that things were going from bad to worse in a hurry.*

*The slicer took a few more stabs at the keyboard and winced at the computer's response. "Stang!" he hissed. He hastily typed in a code and hoped for the best.*

>TK-135-Σ

\*PING!\*

>>EXECUTIVE PASSCODE CONFIRMED<<

*Grif breathed a sigh of relief and accessed the prisoner list. Jamming his datapad into the download slot he saved the entire list and placed the pad in one of his jumpsuit's cargo pockets. A loud crash followed by a thud, the whisper-screech of a blaster set on stun, and a second thud echoed from around the corner. Expecting the worst, the slicer drew his blaster and leapt around the corner.*

*Brin grinned from ear to ear at his handiwork. Both stormtroopers lay at his feet unconscious. "I thought we would waltz into the detention area in style," he chuckled.*

*The day after the prison break, Inquisitor Nidar was more than upset. "You have failed me, Commander," Nidar sneered. Commander Venith's face turned deathly pale and he felt a sharp jab as the interrogator droid injected him with something.\* Venith sank to his knees, an intense pain filling his chest. Nidar snarled, "Unlike Vader, I do not believe in second chances."*

*The last thing Venith ever saw was the Inquisitor leering down at him.*

The slicer is the one archetype in the Star Wars role playing game that intrigues me the most. Unlike their cyberpunk counterparts, slicers aren't always the typical hardwired, neo-anarchist hackers we may be accustomed to seeing in RPGs or literature. In Star Wars, slicers aren't just hackers with information for sale--they act as the eyes and ears of the Empire, Rebellion, and a number of criminal organizations. This article isn't a rehash of the information presented in books such as "Cracken's Rebel Field Guide" or an attempt to turn Star Wars into a space opera version of Shadowrun. Instead, it presents some new security ideas, new equipment, an example computer system and several adventure ideas. I would like to thank several people from the rec.games.frp.cyber crew for helping me with my research for this article: jhove@cs.mcgill.ca (Benoit Jauvin-Girard), ind00069@pegasus (Robert Deck), and shilberg@superdec.uni.uiuc.edu (Necromancer).

## SLICING, COUNTER-SLICERS AND SECURITY

>>"Slicing is only illegal if you get caught."<<

--Crinn Praxus, Alliance slicer

>>"Among slicers there's the good, the bad and the lucky. The good ones rarely get caught and know enough to cover their tracks or at least blame someone else; the bad ones usually get caught and either end up dead or working for the Corporate Sector Authority and I'm the only lucky one left alive."<<

--Kalan Dar, freelance slicer

### Counter-Slicers

Slicing is a dangerous business. Not only do slicers have to deal with living and automated security systems, they also have to deal with the reality of virus programs, counter-slicers and other obstacles standing between them and the files they want. *Star Wars: The RPG* only requires a *Computer Programming/Repair* with the difficulty being the security level of the data, but what about counter-slicers? Slicing into a system such as OMM (Operational Multisystem Management, see the "Han Solo and the Corporate Sector" sourcebook, pg.30) is rather difficult since the data is protected by the most unpredictable system of all--another living being. When slicing into a system protected by a counter-slicer, handle the entire situation as you would a combat situation--the highest *Computer Programming/Repair* roll wins. If the slicer wins the skill contest he or she has avoided detection, fooled the counter-slicer, or has cut the counter-slicer off from the affected system (the player must specify what actions the character is taking to get the data). If the counter-slicer wins, the slicer is detected and an alarm is sounded. However, a successful roll doesn't always mean that the slicer gets the data. Some systems use ICS (Intrusion Countermeasures Software) in tandem with a counter-slicer, requiring the slicer to make another skill roll.

**Example:** Grif is trying to break into a database in one of Kuat Drive Yards's warehouses. He has a *Computer Programming/Repair* code of 5D. The system is protected by a counter-slicer (*Computer Programming/Repair* code of 4D+2) as well as ICS (the data difficulty is 15). Grif has two choices, slice past both the ICS and the counter-slicer in one round (a -1D penalty) or handle the counter-slicer first and then crack the ICS in the next round. Grif's player decides to use the second method and tries to take out the counter-slicer through deception. The player and GM make skill rolls. Grif's player rolls a 12 and the GM rolls a 10 for the counter-slicer--Grif makes the counter-slicer think he is a KDY executive, but almost blows it. Now Grif has to get past the ICS system (difficulty of 15). Grif's player rolls the next round and gets a 16--he gets the data, but almost blows that attempt as well.

### Intrusion Countermeasures Software

Security systems can protect data on two levels--at the source, or core level, and at the



pathway level. With pathway level security, a user must present a password or other piece of identification to use a terminal. Once a terminal has been accessed, the user may get any information he or she wants. With core level security, anyone can use a terminal, but you need a password to get information from the core. Each type of computer system may have a different access requirement. Such requirements include, but are not limited to: tangible I.D.s (cards, rank cylinders), sensor scans (voice or palmprints, retinal scans), passwords, or a combination of precautions. However, no system is foolproof. I.D. chips and rank cylinders can be stolen and palm or voiceprints can sometimes be acquired at gunpoint or from a very good mimic.

When a character fails a *Computer Programming/Repair* roll by half or less than half of the difficulty rate, an alarm is triggered. According to "Cracken's Rebel Field Guide", Imperial computers normally run RRDM (Rapid Repetition Defense Measures) which usually sounds an alarm when a breach is detected, but a few variations on this system undoubtedly exist in Imperial garrisons. However, there has to be more for ICS to do than simply sound an alarm. In addition to sounding an alarm, an ICS system may also do the following:

- \* It can erase or damage information on a slicer's computer or vessel chip. Such a program may also delete essential files or software on the hardware or droid being used to slice the system.
- \* It may force a droid or computer to crash by damaging vital files in the computer or droid's software.
- \* ICS may also write itself into the permanent sectors of a vessel chip, portable computer, memstik, Perzome cartridge, or cyborg implant. These files then act as a trigger for the alarm systems of other computer networks when the character tries to slice in with an infected piece of hardware. This same form of ICS may also leave trace files behind on each system. Such trace files may act as a trail for the local authorities.
- \* The ICS may also use the terminal's power supply to send a surge through the interface cord and into the hardware being used, causing 3D-5D damage to anyone touching the equipment and destroying the equipment being used. Slicers using cyborg implants or only a vessel chip roll their Strength code against the damage roll. Portable computers are rendered useless by the surge.
- \* The ICS may also allow the slicer to get the information, but with a logic bomb written into its code. This logic bomb may cause any of the above results.

## NEW EQUIPMENT

>>"The secret's in the source code."<<

--Vinda Ryll, freelance slicer

Slicers have a large amount of equipment to choose from when breaking into a computer system. Portable computers, computer spikes, vessel chips, cyborg implants and cyborg/droid interface cables make a slicer's life a bit easier. The following pieces of equipment may also be found throughout the galaxy.

### Custom-Coded Computer Spikes

Availability: X

Cost: These spikes are not always for sale, although the price may be left up to the programmer.

Skill: *Computer Programming/Repair*, *Computer Engineering* (optional)

Building Difficulty: Moderate to wipe a spike shell or Difficult to build a shell from scratch.

Programming difficulties are listed by power:

<u>Power</u>	<u>Difficulty</u>
2D-3D	Very Easy
4D-5D	Easy
6D-7D	Moderate
8D-9D	Difficult
10D	Very Difficult
11D+	Heroic

**Description:** Many slicers prefer to use their own custom-programmed spikes instead of relying on difficult-to-find commercial spikes. To construct a spike, the slicer either needs a portable computer and a blank (or used) spike shell or the materials and tools to build a spike shell. The slicer then takes the shell, slots it into the computer, and begins programming the new spike. Many slicers refuse to sell their spike programs since each program is a secret (and also because spikes are illegal). However, there are a few who are willing to sell a spike or two--for the right price. These spikes work like any normal spike listed in "Cracken's Rebel Field Guide".

### **Perzome Vessel Cartridges**

**Availability:** R

**Cost:** 100 credits multiplied by the data die code

**Cyber Points:** 0

**Description:** Perzome Vessel Cartridges are a spinoff of the Perzome Knowledge Cartridge and are used by cyborgs who do not have a vessel chip. These cartridges may hold up to 6D of data and the cyborg may access and interact with it if he or she chooses to. All vessel cartridges come with virus protection.

### **Neuro-Saav Cyborg/Computer Interface**

**Availability:** 1

**Cost:** 600 credits

**Cyber Points:** 0

**Description:** The cyborg/computer interface places the cyborg and the computer on the same level and alleviates the need of a portable computer. This reduces all *Computer Programming/Repair* difficulties by one level. The cyborg runs a greater risk of injury through this interface as a hostile system could send a power surge through the cable and into the cyborg implants, causing 3D-5D damage.

## **THE IMPERIAL ARCHIVES**

This is an example system for GMs to use in their campaigns. It is my explanation of how the Empire keeps track of so much information, especially information on members of the Rebellion and Rebel sympathizers.

### **System History and Organization**

Shortly after the New Order was established, the Republican Archives went through a sudden and shocking transformation. Knowing that knowledge from the past could be dangerous to his regime, the Emperor ordered the HoloNet to be dismantled and the public to be barred from access to the archives. Palpatine originally planned to use the archives to store the history of his empire, but he didn't expect any kind of organized resistance against the New Order. Now the archives serve as a military database, storing the records of each sector and oversector. Such records keep the Emperor and his emissaries updated on the war and any political enemies they may have gained or lost. All materials, ranging from status reports to intelligence transmissions and COMPNOR propaganda, are funneled to and accessed from the archives through the Imperial CompLink. Records are kept on the activities of COMPNOR, Imperial Intelligence, and the Imperial Army and Navy in each sector. A

separate part of the archive system is linked to the Imperial Enforcement DataCore (see "Galaxy Guide 9: Fragments from the Rim", pg. 51) to keep track of criminals and bounty hunters in the Empire. The records are organized by sector or oversector and the Moffs and Grand Moffs have access to all information concerning their sector and only basic information concerning other sectors and oversectors.

Information exchange between COMPNOR, the military and Imperial Intelligence is a rather sticky topic. The Imperial Navy and Army exchange information with relative freedom since they rely on each other in combat. COMPNOR and the military exchange information only when both side benefit in the exchange. Imperial Intelligence only exchanges information with COMPNOR or the military when it benefits both Imperial Intelligence and the New Order.

As a safety precaution, the main system on Coruscant has sister systems in the Emperor's Mount Tantiss base on Wayland and on Byss, one of the Emperor's leisure worlds in the deep galactic core.

### System Security

Security in the Archives is tight, and like all the other Imperial systems, the Archives on the RRD program and rank cylinders for security. Officers may access information within the jurisdiction of their rank as well as the Imperial Archives on Coruscant and Byss. Officers of rank Commander through Colonel have access to Very Easy or Easy level information outside of their jurisdiction. Grand Moffs and Moffs have access to Easy level information in the entire Imperial network. The Emperor has free run of the archives as does Vader. However, the Emperor keeps a tight rein on the access privileges of his advisors and apprentices to prevent them from becoming a threat to him. A Difficult *Computer Programming/Repair* roll is necessary to falsify a code in order to gain access without a cylinder or to get information above the cylinder's rank level.

<u>RANK</u>	<u>MAXIMUM DIFFICULTY (within jurisdiction)</u>
Grand Moff (Priority Sector High Commander)	Very Difficult
Moff (Sector Governor-General)	Very Difficult
Admiral	Very Difficult
General	Very Difficult
Colonel	Very Difficult
Major	Very Difficult
Commander	Very Difficult
Captain	Moderate
Lieutenant	Moderate
Leftenant (Lieutenant, jg)	Moderate

The Empire has also started employing counter-slicers to maintain the ever-growing archives and to keep slicers out. Due to the Empire's policy toward slicers, all of the archivists come from within the ranks of Imperial Intelligence, COMPNOR, or the military. Any counter-slicers caught stealing information or breaking into high security areas are executed. Such a display of Imperial power has kept the archives secure from within for years.

### Using the Archives

The Imperial Archives can play a major part in keeping the PCs and the Alliance informed on the Empire's activities. However, it should remain in the background and shouldn't be used as a cop-out for intelligence sources. Tapping the archives, even through the Imperial CompLink, is like playing with fire--if it's done enough times someone usually gets burned. For example, if the PCs are rooting through the office of a garrison commander, they might turn up a vital holofile downloaded from the archives or they may be informed that some vital intelligence reports are based on information stolen from the archives (this should be rare). Given the amount of political distrust and intrigue among the ranks of the Empire, the Imperial Archives are not always reliable. Signals get

garbled or altered in transit and sometimes files get "lost" or end up being "delayed" by personnel. A file which may be in the archives on Coruscant may not exist in the archives on Byss or Wayland, or perhaps it exists in all three archive systems, but each copy is completely different from the others.

## ADVENTURE IDEAS:

*The Virus:* Alliance Intelligence has learned that the Empire is designing a virus program capable of taking over computer systems and droids. The virus, which is a form of artificial intelligence, is being designed by a group of corporate or Imperial slicers at a garrison within the sector. The PCs are sent to confirm the reports. This mission presents several problems for the PCs. What do they do with the virus program? Destroy the files? Release the virus into the garrison's computers and possibly even the HoloNet and CompLink? What do they do with the slicers? Kill them? Persuade them to destroy the virus program and join the Rebellion? Help them design a defense against the virus?

Releasing the virus into the Imperial network would not only cause problems for the Empire, but also for Alliance Intelligence, which undoubtedly has the CompLink and HoloNet both tapped. Eventually the virus would make its way into personal and public computer systems, threatening innocent people, something which the Alliance will not stand for. Killing the slicers is another action which should be frowned upon by the GM. Since the Alliance is against senseless killing, the PCs should do all they can to get through the mission with as little bloodshed as possible.

*The Mindbender:* Rumor has it that one of the Alliance's top slicers, Crinn Praxus, has turned traitor. A recent holofilm made by an agent at the Rebel base on Tiryl clearly shows Praxus sabotaging the base's defense systems. Praxus then fled to one of his hideouts on Shaladar, a world on the fringe of the Outer Rim Territories. Agents on Shaladar have been tracking Praxus and have reported that, according to Imperial transmissions, an ISB team will arrive in one day to apprehend the slicer.

What the PCs and Alliance Intelligence do not know is that Praxus was not acting under his own power. On his last run on the Imperial CompLink, Praxus downloaded a file which had subliminal commands written into it. Upon viewing the holofile, he was programmed to reveal the location and sabotage the defenses of the next Rebel base he went to. The PCs must track down Praxus, apprehend him and take him back to the nearest Rebel base for a court martial. Praxus has no memory of sabotaging the Tiryl base's defenses, but he does remember feeling a bit sick after viewing one of the holofiles he downloaded. The subliminal holofiles are a minor factor in this adventure, but they could lead to a variation of *The Virus*.

*Corporate Capers:* A Rebel sympathizer in Kuat Drive Yards has reported that the Empire is contracting KDY to design and build a hyperspace-capable starfighter. The PCs are sent to steal a copy of the specs and, if necessary, destroy the original design plans. However, rumor has it that the sympathizer is a double agent and so the proposed starfighter plans may be the bait for an ambush. Of course, the sympathizer doesn't have to be a double agent. The reports could also indicate that several ISB agents have infiltrated the upper echelons of the corporation. Any way you look at it, the mission gives new meaning to the phrase, "*Caveat emptor*."

*The Void Raiders:* Alliance Intelligence cells in Seswenna sector have intercepted a large number of distress signals from Imperial ships under attack by one of the Empire's *Imperial II*-class star destroyers, the *Darkblade*. Alliance High Command recently sent two diplomatic teams to negotiate with the renegade captain in hopes he or she would join the Rebellion, but neither team has been heard from. In fact, it may be too late--the *Darkblade* was recently crippled in an ambush set up by the sector fleet. The PCs are sent to rescue any survivors but discover the ship is run by droids--all the living crew members are dead. Checking the ship's flight log reveals what actually happened to the crew and the

diplomatic teams sent by the Alliance. Perhaps a biological weapon was accidentally (or deliberately) released on board the ship, killing the crew and forcing the droids to run the ship. The droids could have also gained their independence from humans after the ship passed too close to an anomaly in space. Worse yet, the droids and the ship could be infected with the virus program from the first adventure hook (if the PCs released it into the CompLink or HoloNet). In any case, the droids are now "void droids"—completely uncontrollable and irrational from a lack of maintenance. (For more information on void droids, see pg.25 of the adventure "Scavenger Hunt".) Regardless of the threat (biological or mechanical), the PCs must escape and report this threat to Alliance High Command. If possible the PCs should sabotage or even destroy the ship (e.g. set off the self-destruct system, plant bombs near on the engines, etc).

## IS WHITE WOLF GOING TOO FAR?

**NOTE:** This is strictly an opinion piece. The statements made in this article do not represent the opinions of the ELCA (Evangelical Lutheran Church in America), the CAR-PGa (Committee for the Advancement of Role-Playing Games), or the gaming community at large (both on and off the Internet), they are simply my own thoughts on the subject. Readers and contributors to *Interregnum* who wish to discuss this, or any other topic which may pop up as an opinion piece, are free to do so through snail- or e-mail as long as they do so in a civil manner. "Flames" and other uncivilized mail will be directed to File 13 (a.k.a. the wastebasket).

Is White Wolf going too far in their games and advertising? Think about it. Right now, things are pretty quiet here in the U.S. for the gaming community. The only major problem we're facing is the anti-lead bill in New York. (I don't have up-to-date information on this situation—could someone fill me in on the status of this problem?) In Canada, gamers are facing a bill which could alter the face of our hobby forever. Meanwhile, White Wolf is printing games which have some extreme occultic and violent overtones (e.g. *Werewolf: The Apocalypse*, *Mage: The Ascension*, *Vampire: The Masquerade* and its new *Wraith* RPG due out this summer). From what I've heard, White Wolf's material has been known (according to discussion I've read on the Internet) to go to extremes on subjects such as the occult, homosexuality, and violence. The magick system in *Mage* is, according to a friend, based on concepts devised by the late Alistair Crowley, who was a renowned sorcerer in Britain. Several hobby shops in Dallas, Texas refused to carry the "Clanbook *Brujah*" supplement for *Vampire* because of profane language. The Guild of Adventure Gaming and Wargames West both refuse to sell some or all of White Wolf's books because of their obligation to uphold a good image for both gamers and the general public. The Guild is closing down completely on December 31st of this year because the owners decided not to carry White Wolf's products. White Wolf's advertising is just as bad, if not worse. One ad proclaims, "You've been warned," and "Don't run home to Mama." on a white background covered with the phrase "It's just a Game." Another ad features a badly scrawled memo from a playtest coordinator asking for, "... more playtesters and another dozen straightjackets. . ." Beside the memo, a press release from White Wolf states, "There is absolutely no truth to the rumor that our playtesters' sanity has been threatened. Furthermore, we firmly and categorically deny that the sudden institutionalization of a group of playtesters in Harrisburg, PA has anything to do with our game. . ."

I'm not saying that people who play White Wolf's RPGs are evil, but as a Christian, I wonder what kind of image these games and ads create in the eye of the religious community and the public in general. A mother looking over the shoulder of her teenage son while he flips through the *Werewolf: The Apocalypse* rulebook is probably going to be more than persuaded to think that her son is delving into the occult. The local minister probably won't turn a blind eye to such material either. It's hard enough to defend our hobby when school and religious groups claim RPGs cause insanity and suicidal tendencies in players. It gets even harder when an RPG company produces ads which flirt with the

same idea. In a letter to *Dragon Magazine*, one gamer stated: "...there *is* elemental evil in the real world. It's a joke to most gamers. But it's a short step from a pentagram inscribed in the *Dungeon Master's Guide* to messing around with tarot cards, Ouija boards, and Darkness. 'My magic-user casts a sleep spell,' works just fine. When you get into specifics like symbology and actual arcane markings, you *are* playing with fire, as the barriers between ourselves and Satan are there for a reason." As a Christian, I am inclined to agree. I have always seen RPGs as a form of telling heroic stories of good triumphing over evil—not stories of darkness, violence or depravity.

White Wolf's response to the uproar its games have caused is just as questionable as its advertising. White Wolf recently issued a rather nasty, if not immature, fax that tells (in its opinion) why Wargames West will no longer handle a majority of its products. Some players and GMs cry, "Censorship!" whenever a distributor refuses to sell White Wolf's books. Why can't White Wolf wake up and see what these games could do to the image of our hobby? Some gamers may label my stance as being "politically correct" (e.g. the GM stays away from "evil" subjects like homosexuality or substance abuse and everybody's characters live happily ever-after, etc., etc., *ad nauseam*); In my opinion it isn't. I'm just concerned about the spiritual questions and dangers posed by such graphic material and what it could do to the image of our hobby. Give me the heroism of Star Wars, the humor and mayhem of Toon or the satire of Paranoia any day, but leave the darkness and depravity alone.



Welcome ye landlubbers! Ye be in for another spewing of brine, seaweed and shiver me timber, not even I know what else. Lessen' you be a lilly livered scurvy dog.

## Not so Special F/X

a.k.a.-Cheap

I like to add a little something when I GM to help suspend disbelief a little. Sometimes very minor details can greatly enhance the look and feel of a game. In a *Runequest* game I ran our group had played a little too much together; they knew the personalities of the people (not necessarily the characters to well), and could judge what they would do in any given circumstance. So to alleviate this boredom they would constantly play (not necessarily unjustly) the "why would I adventure with you folk" game. This is all fine and dandy up to a point but it had degenerated so far that every player wanted to go their own way in all the games. Often they'd retire the PC and bring in a new character; they'd refuse to have the same background (or race) of any of the others as that was "really boring." This happened over and over again and I found this rather entertaining, so I thought I would surprise them in a new campaign idea I had designed: *Escape from Each Other!* It all starts with the PCs meeting at a bar (I couldn't resist the cliché) in a very small two-story inn. They did whatever they wanted for the day, see an Eastern Islander that is renting a room upstairs and meet the usual boring cast of bards, strangers sitting in the corner and any

other usual boring stereotypical crap. After they went to sleep they are awakened by a huge explosion. Smoke and fire permeated the inn and the main support beam above their heads has been cracked. At this point all the PCs (and anyone else sleeping in the same area of the inn) are connected via an invisible force field that only affects them. The furthest they could go from each other was 20 meters; then the equivalent of two people traveling opposite ways in a hula hoop happens. The people on the furthest edge hit each other at the same



A beautiful young lass peddling rubber ducks on the islands.

time. It was a very big surprise as they didn't figure this part out until much later after they discovered that the Eastern Islanders' room was the source of the explosion. The top of the Inn was blown off and there were no apparent survivors. One player tried to ride away and started to drag the party with them before they figured it out. When they checked their belongings they each found a strange coin that had previously not been there; At this point I

had some Chinese coins from the 1500's (simulated) and gave one to each PC. Each coin had a slightly varying design, and they had to decide what to do with them. Unfortunately at this point I hadn't decided exactly what the coins' history was and what the designs meant so I waited for a good explanation from the PCs that sounded cool and go with it. This might have been a mistake but that's a different story. They all seemed to really enjoy pondering the actual physical prop and it was a very small investment on my part (\$10).

Another look and feel prop for a modern or post holocaust campaign is the language used. I get tired of hearing "so they're talking about blah, blah, blah." I want

to hear what is really going on and decide for myself. So I thought it would be fun to give the official military call letters to give the real feel of listening in on a police radio band or hearing letters being called out while you have the decoding key and realizing that they are calling an airstrike on your current location! Well here they are and I hope they are useful

Alpha  
Bravo  
Charlie  
Delta  
Echo  
Foxtrot  
Golf  
Hotel  
India  
Juliette  
Kilo  
Lima  
Mike  
November  
Oscar  
Papa  
Quebec  
Romeo  
Sierra  
Tango  
Uniform  
Victor  
Whiskey  
X-ray  
Yankee  
Zulu

introduction was in *Aye Matey* IV (Int. #3) this part is about what really happened to the world as opposed to religious dogma (they be followin' the mermaids says I).

There really was a nuclear exchange that pretty much changed the face of the planet, but it didn't happen until about 50 years after the Howling Coyotes retreated into their shelters. Thus technology had advanced a considerable bit before the nuclear exchange. Unfortunately the reckless abandon of this pursuit of technology is what caused the nuclear exchange to take place (how

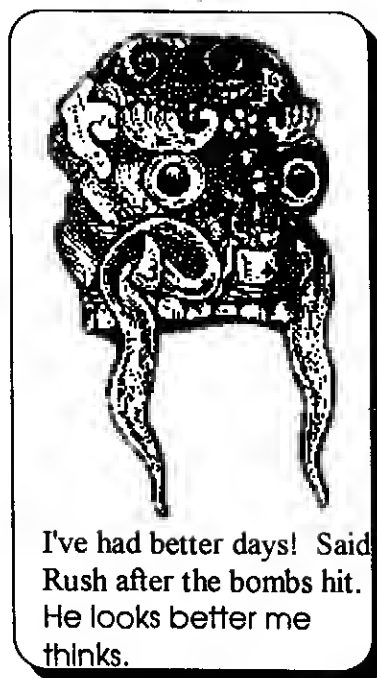
ironic...and stereotypical of those amoral scientists).

Unfortunately the current state of the world seems to be more a state of gang warfare than anything civilized. The fight for power in the former Rocky Mountain Range (it's now a combination of plains and hills) in Colorado is between the Twisted Metal Mo 4's and Dingo's (no one seems to know how they came up with that name).

The Twisted Metal Mo 4's (commonly referred to as the 4's) are totally dedicated to brewing lotsa lousy tasting beer and having a good time at the expense of others. They aren't

very organized but they appeal to a lot of people so they have huge number of members. They are easy to spot as they all seem to wear very bright chrome plated chains for belts, collars and some even use them as rains for driving their vehicle.

The Dingo's are few in number but are a bit cleverer than the 4s. They have managed to map out the radiation hot spots and managed to luck upon two hot spot areas with a 50' safe zone between them, they can make hit-and-run raids at will and if they can make it back to the hot zone no one will follow (no one that knows the area at least). They take what they can and steal whatever else they need from the 4's. They can be identified by the faded brown



I've had better days! Said  
Rush after the bombs hit.  
He looks better me  
thinks.

to someone:

## Bomb Shelters of the Holy II

a.k.a. -The Survivalists Were Right?!

Well I promised to give a little more background to this setting and unfortunately for you it's coming up now. While the



leather jackets that they wear and really bad fake Australian accents.

Par-O'-Dice is about the only city within a couple of hundred miles. It got its name from a group of families gambling the last of their rations away in a game of craps. The city has mellowed out a bit since those days and even has a small but very corrupt and efficient police force. If the party from the Howling Coyotes were to drive into this town it is very likely that their solar powered vehicle would be impounded and given to the mayor as gas is a highly sought after commodity. A vehicle that requires none would be one of the most valuable things in the whole area.

One of the good things the party might stumble across in the basement of some abandoned house would be an old paper indicating that an international group of scientists had successfully established a colony on Mars. The colony has blossomed into an anarchists dream. It has advanced to the level of just about to put together another colony. The colony is headed for one of Jupiter's moons that had been created after a meteor had a tremendous collision and in an unexplainable action popped out the opposite side of Jupiter and established an orbit. The atmosphere contains a rich supply of water that is easily made breathable with simple operation. Unfortunately they have had little to no experience with conflict and are possibly woefully unprepared for the mentality of Coyotes. They could be easily taken advantage of. Currently there is only one group that can reach the scientific community on Mars and that is the Biogenetic Colliders.

The Colliders are an advanced libertarian society that lives deep in the crust of the earth. They got their initial start as a privately funded supercollider project, but when the executive officers were visiting from the main New York office branch when the nukes touched down and the rest is history. They have built a huge expanded underground city that has made significant technologic leaps. They however do not care about the surface world (at least most of them) and

believe that if you can't work then you shouldn't eat. They will do almost anything as long as you pay for it. One major difference that should be noted is they seem to no magic whatsoever.

I don't think I mentioned magic before but there are small amounts of magic in the world. It is rather unpredictable as the power seems to fade and strengthen intermittently as does its form. No one knows were they get the power and why it seems to only work for people that seem to have lost their sanity or people that are a bit on the slow side. What's actually happening is Project Steroid Stallion: A satellite orbiting at about 1,300 mph. This single satellite was indirectly responsible for the nuclear exchange. Project Steroid Stallion was the brainchild of President Olliver North, it is a psionic amplifier that he planned to use with his specially trained crack assassin squad that was going to eliminate all the opposing leaders in one foul swoop but the USSR intelligence uncover the plot and the Soviet Premiere ordered the nuclear strike as there seemed to be no way to defend against this. The satellite seems to work for people that especially "touched" in much the same way as Peter Sellers character in *Being There*. If someone believes they can really walk on water, if the satellite isn't on the other side of the earth, they can.

## Magic: The Gathering of Statistics

Many people I know just aren't sure how rare is rare; for example, if it is true that there are fewer Legends rare then uncommon Arabians. In an effort to put their minds at ease I have a bunch of roughly agreed upon statistics (at least on [rec.games.deckmaster](http://rec.games.deckmaster)) that actually surprised me. Did you know there as many Arabian commons (C1) as Antiquities rare (U1)? Whenever you see a letter with a number beside it (i.e.-U2) the letter indicates if

the cards was on the Rare, Uncommon or Common sheet (a sheet is a giant piece of cardstock that has a hundred and twenty something cards on it) and the number indicates how many cards were on that sheet (i.e. U2 would mean it was on the uncommon sheet and there were two of those cards on that sheet.) Without any further hoopla here's the list in order of rarity with the rarest cards listed first. The number indicates the amount of any single card ever made (i.e. there was

### Out of Print Magic Rarity List

Alpha R1-----	1,200
Beta R1-----	3,100
Alpha U1-----	4,300
Dragon Con Cards-----	10,000
Beta U1-----	12,900
Alpha C1-----	15,300
Unlimited R1-----	16,500
Legends R1-----	19,300
Arabian U2-----	20,000
Arabian U3-----	30,000
Arabian C1-----	30,000
Antiquities U1-----	30,000
Arabian U4-----	40,000
Beta C1-----	46,000
Legends U1-----	57,000
Antiquities U2-----	60,000
Unlimited U1-----	68,900
Antiquities U3-----	90,000
Antiquities C1-----	90,000
Legends U2-----	115,700
Arabian C4-----	120,000
Arabian C5-----	150,000
Antiquities C2-----	180,000
Legends C1-----	212,000
Unlimited C1-----	245,200
Arabian Nights C11-----	330,000
Antiquities C4-----	360,000
Legends C2-----	424,200

only 1,200 alpha Black Lotuses ever made).

### Weird Magic Ideas

I am currently working a selective pestilence deck. After playing a number of games it seemed that all my opponents had flying creatures. It seemed that if I find some use for a useless creature that I never used before (the Iff-Biff Efreet) that I could have some fun. Then someone pointed out to me something truly disgusting: "I think he would work better with a spirit link." That is so gross I had to give it a try. The trick is earthbinding the Iff-Biff so he doesn't commit suicide and having a circle protection green just in case you have to slap him out early. Don't put any flying creatures in your deck (except for the fire sprites to cast the Earthbind). Play this deck once and your Iff-Biff will soon have the life expectancy of an Royal Assassin :D

### The Scuttle

This area will be used to review great and crappy games, be they board, computer or role-playing (tabletop, live or otherwise). All the computer games reviewed here were run on a 386DX-40MHz, co-processor, 8 meg RAM, MS DOS 6.0, Windows 3.1, and a Pro Sonic 16 sound card (100% compatible with Adlib and Soundblaster cards) system.

*All games are based on the Jolly Roger Scale (1-10 1 being poorest piece-o-krud ever seen and 10 being great keg-o-fun).*

### Home Medical Advisor Pro

by-Stephen Schueler, MD, F.A.C.E.P.  
Brought to you by-Pixel Perfect Inc.

Jolly Roger Rating-6.5

System Requirements- CD-ROM Drive, 4 Mb RAM, Windows, and a 386DX or greater, and a 256 Color VGA monitor and card.

No, I'm not sick. That seems to be what everyone keeps asking me when I told them I bought this program. I just thought it would be cool to find out what the doctor was really saying and get a cheap second opinion if the need ever arose.

The Advisor has some very fascinating stuff on it but it seems to lack any real detail. I guess that's ok as I wouldn't want people with half the knowledge playing doctor; but I want to know more detailed information. I liked the way they presented the information to you with two types of hypertext words, one that takes you to more

information about the topic and the other which gives you the definition so you don't have to flip around a lot. One thing that sort of upset me with the program is that they have a male or female body on which you point to the part of the body in question. That takes you to a series of diagnoses. What upset me was that the people had clothes on. I can understand not wanting children to look at dirty pictures but this is a home medical program! People have problems everywhere not just in the g-rated areas.

Other than that I don't have that many gripes with it. It has an interesting section of video clips. I was a bit confused as to the reason to show a diver releasing a sea snake, but I guess they had some extra space left over. One interesting video segment showed what they do for a carpal tunnel syndrome operation (something I find interesting because a lot of people I know are on the borderline of having to have this operation done).

Another section covered drug mixtures. This is an invaluable tool as some people forget if they can take this and drink alcohol or whatever. I doubt I'll ever really get to use this part but you never know. It's also

fun to play with all the drugs and see if you can come up with a hazardous mixture. This could be a cool party game!

All in all it was an interesting experience but I'm hoping for something a little more detailed in a future program.

## Davey Jones' Locker

or Comments to Interregnum #4

Curtis Taylor- Hope the rarity data in this issue of Aye Matey helps you in your

collecting. Hmm...after seeing your list of Legends cards perhaps we should make a trade or two.

David Hoberman- I like the alien culture idea of slapping funny noses and a different uniform (no two alien races dress alike). Perhaps it was the basis of the 50's fear of anyone who looked different (subconsciously they knew they were all aliens.)

Doug Jorenby- Enjoyed your writing on M:tG. I would have never guessed that M:tG would have

showed up in the General much less as the 3rd rated game. i must however disagree with the game teaching nothing outside of the game. I actually find it a good economic simulator. It would be great for teaching kids the law of supply and demand. What happens to the prices when new expansions are released, how people here the rumors of what's coming out and try to trade on inside information etc ... Learning how to make deals, diplomacy (most games are really multi player and if you don't have any diplomacy but raw strength you will usually lose), and creative mathematics.



**George Phillies-** Thanks for the comments. I'll have to check out the *Balance of War*.

more reference material. Good to see you aboard!

**Collie Collier-** I'm afraid that I find most academia papers a little dry for my tastes. However I am curious as to the final grade that you received as some professors aren't science fiction fans.

**Eric Robinson-** Very interesting once you explained the "game" of hidden and double meanings. Most fiction that I've found in zines tend to be incredibly straightforward. You should really finish it as the ending I heard was very amusing. Hopefully people will give it a second read through, your introductory commentary was hysterical.

**Virgil Green-** I have to agree with your view of magic as science to a degree but it could be wild if based on something unpredictable. I know you talked about the same thing in conjuring a demon, but what if the power was based upon drawing the magic from demons?

**David Dunham-** So many names in so little time. It was interesting but I couldn't keep up with all the names. I guess I'll have to read



Aye, what  
manner of foul  
beast be this?

**Rob Butler-** Very entertaining reading experience. I could place myself in the cockpit and started to feel queasy!

**Peter Maranci-** I liked the stuff you managed to salvage from the adventure contest. I would think you need more character write ups to make a full fledged adventure out of it. I like the idea of the pissed off nobles that are dueling to the death and will turn on the party if they interfere (nice touch).

**GilPili-** I think you need some zany characters and situation to alleviate the overall seriousness of it all. Perhaps a singing gorp hsunchen or something. :D

## Colophon

Aye, Matey was created on Ami Pro v. 3.01. Most of the graphics are provided via a cheap hand held Logitech scanner and most of the pictures are from various Dover books (also known as copyright free).

# THE EIGHT TRACK MIND #V

## Number Five (Is Alive!)

Ramblings on RPGs, SF, and Misc.

Virgil S. Greene

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Well, here we are back again! I see after looking at the last go round that I promised nothing specific for this issue, so off to the official topic...

## HUMAN NATURE: HUMANS AND OTHER SENTIENTS

That last bit of the title is my own slant on this whole business. What sort of nature should aliens and demi-humans have, and have they been portrayed in any convincing way in SF, Fantasy, and RPGs? Can we successfully role-play non-humans, and should we even try? Some suggest that it is in fact impossible to role-play a non-human and forbid them as player characters.

In many cases, non-humans are merely humans with slightly odd features or humans in unusual bodies. This is particularly true of television SF; an alien's only difference from a terrestrial human may be a ridge on the nose like Trek's Bajorans. This of course is a function of the general necessity to use human actors though occasionally puppetry, elaborate suits, or even computer animation is used to produce a more "alien" alien. But even if the creature looks alien it still often acts fairly human. Even in role-playing games where it isn't necessary for an extraterrestrial or demi-human to be physically represented by a human the over all nature of the creature is either recognizably

human or an exaggerated aspect of human nature.

Look at Trek's aliens. Klingons are savage, but honorable, warriors. Essentially they're like some human barbarians. Cardassians are pretty much fascists. Romulans are imperialistic militarists. Ferengis are greedy capitalists. These "aliens" are dominated by an aspect of human nature or culture. And when a character of an alien race gets more developed he or she becomes more like a complete human. The Klingon Worf shows compassion and love. The Ferengi Quark shows devotion and courage, sometimes. They aren't truly aliens.

Now in role-playing games as often as not character races end up being humans with special abilities. This of course is probably the fault of players who don't elect to create a different characterization as much or more than a lack in the design of the games. RuneQuest Glorantha makes some effort to make the races different, but I think to an extent they still are exaggerated partial humans and get played as such. One exception might be the Dragonewts; the intention with them is that they are incomprehensibly alien. The way this is

supposed to be simulated is that 'newts start without real personality traits and as they grow they develop opposed pairs of traits with a certain amount of randomness as to which trait will dominate. As they go through the various life stages they have to reach balance in the pairs of



traits. Unfortunately this information isn't in current write ups of dragonewts and is only available in old Wyrms Footnotes (the old Chaosium newsletter) and was recently repeated by Sandy Peterson on the RQ Digest. Most folk aren't aware of this so the alienness of 'newts is manifested by the 'newts acting like Daffy Duck.



It could be argued that a lot of basic human nature will be common to all intelligent species. And possibly most intelligent races will have a vaguely humanoid bodyshape. What sort of things will likely be common in most races?

1. An intelligent race will have some sort of appendage for manipulating things. These appendages will often resemble human hands, though something similar to an elephant's trunk would work fairly well and some sort of set of tentacles might work.

2. The creatures will probably walk more or less upright, at least part of the time. The manipulating appendages must be free to manipulate. Two legged designs should be fairly common as you need at least two legs and much more than that is not efficient. This doesn't mean that there couldn't be a race of centaur-like creatures, or tripedal creatures like Niven's *Puppeteers*.

3. They will generally have a verbal language. There's not a lot of chance of telepathy and there's difficulties in using visual signals or other senses like smell or taste for communication.

4. They won't be really small creatures; there is (probably) a certain minimum size for an

intelligent creature's brain. So we won't likely see intelligent mouse sized aliens.

5. They will use tools of some sort, though these could take forms that we might not immediately recognize.

6. They will likely have varied diets as such adaptability is probably one of the by-products of intelligence.

7. They will invest a lot of effort in raising their children. While they might not necessarily have families as we know them, there will still be sort of parental or group involvement in child raising.

8. They will have some form of social order. It may not be a government as such, but they will be organized by law or custom. I doubt that there'd be intelligent hermit races.

Hmmm, that doesn't narrow things down much, does it? Plus it should be noted that when we deal with fantasy races a lot of the things I've noted may not apply. However, a race that fits all the things I've listed is probably going to be somewhat comprehensible, and thus describable.

But...what about really alien creatures? How do we portray a virtually incomprehensible non-human without just spouting gibberish? I'm not sure, but I'd suggest that even a really unusual creature is at least going to be slightly understandable in some way since we're all subject to the same physical laws. But that's not necessarily the case in Call of Cthulhu or potentially other settings. In some cases gibberish may be the only way to go, but *apparent* gibberish that really has meaning is better. Observe the Vorlon ambassador Kosh on Babylon 5; his speech has meaning but it is strange and cryptic.

I guess that while we can't really "become the alien" we can at least simulate certain aspects of a non-human that correspond to human nature and fake the rest.

## LOOKING BACKWARD

The magazine Vortex is on hiatus according to information in a recent issue of Shadis. They may be back next year.

## COMMENTS ON IR #IV

### \* The Editorial page: Peter Maranci

On comments and universal interest: I agree that if we have an excessive amount of comments we end up appealing to nobody but the contributors.

### \* The Log That Flies #4: Peter Maranci

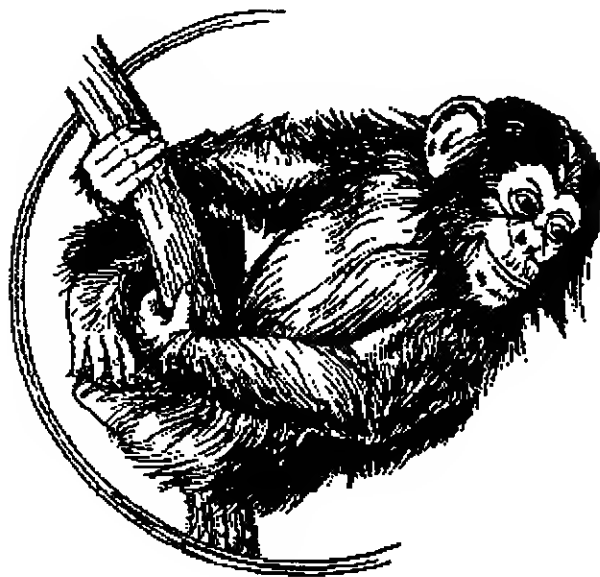
On Technology and repairs: Hmmm, Maintenance Quest. The saga of a generation ship's repair crew! Somehow I think that there's just somethings players prefer to ignore. :)

On the MattMark module: That was more interesting than I remember, looking forward to seeing more on it.

### \* Who Is John Gault? #4: Curtis Taylor

Interesting stuff on RQ. On MtG Legends:

Bottom line for me was that it was a really interesting expansion that sold out incredibly fast. :(



### \* The Skeleton Key #10: David Hoberman

On playing other cultures: This is an area I'll probably go into myself at some point, but from a different emphasis. One thing that bothers me a bit is that in some cases people's belief systems aren't treated respectfully. An Evangelical in an RPG or in fiction will often be portrayed as a hick Fundamentalist fanatic when most aren't. Also there's the interesting notion of the old AD&D Deities and Demigods/ Legends and Lore that gave stats for gods that are actively worship in Japan and India. It strikes me that I'd be a bit potentially offended if somebody published stats for Jesus. Weird tangent here...

### \* Session Notes #18: Doug E. Jorenby

On Magic: The Gathering :Hmmm, I doubt that I'd have spent much on RPG stuff if I wasn't buying Magic cards. As a rare GM, there's not that much I want. I will pick up the GURPS CthulhuPunk when it comes out. I

know almost no one who plays Magic for ante. As far as things "beyond the content of the game", well, many of the cards feature quotes from various works of literature. Ain't much, to be sure.

### \* Refugee #1: George Phillies

One would almost think these title numbers are random. :) On the STNG ecological collapse: In one episode of STNG it was determined that warp drive caused rifts in space, and there was a low warp speed limit established. But in the last episode when Picard is in his future self ships have no trouble going warp 13. The big problem in the last episode was a space/time anomaly that spread backwards through time and could destroy humanity. It involved tachyon probes and was a lot illogical.

On the War of the Worlds TV show: Apparently the logic was that everybody blocked the alien invasion out of their minds; almost no one remembered that they had invaded. Pretty darned silly.

### \* The Unnamed Zine: Collie Collier

A poly-sci paper on a game world. That's very unusual. :)

### \* Strange Sands: Gilbert Pili

Interesting module. I assume that in a AH published version that there'd be stats for the main NPCs?

### \* Flight By Committee: Robert W. Butler

The notion of flying a real plane in a simulated dogfight is strangely appealing. I can see Russia making its left over

military equipment into a war theme park. :)

## Final Bits:

Naturally all copyrighted and trademarked names are the property of their owners and I wouldn't want it any other way. Next time I might give my assessment of the future. Maybe...





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